

Destination Puglia & Basilicata

The Italians have a way with words. They call southern Italy the *mezzogiorno* (midday), which seems to sum up both the climate and the atmosphere. In summer, the *soleone* (lion sun) beats overhead, driving towns to close shutters and shut up shop for the afternoon, ripening the olives, fruit and fresh vegetables, putting power in the local wine and meaning the best place to go is always the beach.

The south and north of this complicated country have long had a difficult relationship. The rural south has suffered economic hardship of a type unknown in the urbane north, whose residents call southerners *terroni* (literally 'of the land', less politely, 'peasants'). Unemployment today is still around 20% higher in the south than in the north. Southern Italy's history is one of invasion and emigration, though immigration is increasingly significant. As the lesser developed regions of a country whose economy is largely moribund, Puglia and Basilicata's future seems uncertain (despite the discovery of oil in Basilicata). Yet here, also, families remain stronger, traditions run deeper and people who live here speak of how good it is to know your neighbours and to have your family close at hand. Those who move away miss the sun, the sea and the slowness.

FAST FACTS

Combined population:
4.66 million

Birth rate: 1.29

GDP per person: €16,000

Unemployment rate:
34.3%

Land Area: 29,340 sq km

Area of Pollino Park:
1960 sq km

Gargano orchid
species: 85

Average farm labour
wages: €5 per hour

Percentage of Italian
olive oil produced in
Puglia: 40%

Annual wine production:
7.6 hectolitres

Puglia and Basilicata have powerful and distinct characters. Puglia is a lush, largely flat farming region, skirted by a long coast that alternates between glittering cliffs and long white-sand beaches. Its pipsqueak neighbour Basilicata is rocky, hilly and wild, with mountaintop villages, a dramatic stretch of coast to rival the Amalfi further north, and the extraordinary cave-town of Matera. Puglia's rustic, simple cuisine, born out of poverty, garners increasing attention and plaudits and Basilicata produces one of Italy's finest wines from its volcanic soil. Fresh, robust ingredients, seas of silver-green olive trees and winemaking vines, and a culture where food and drink are a way of expressing friendship, love and enjoying life: eating here is bound to be good.

Both regions have become achingly hip in the travel press and are gradually being discovered by foreign tourists – opened up through low-cost flights coming into Bari and Brindisi. Italian tourists have been in the know for years, swarming south every summer. In July and August Puglia hosts nightly festivals celebrating anything from snails to meatballs, parties on the beaches, concerts, events and a profusion of summery hubbub. Basilicata has attracted attention since Mel Gibson chose Matera's pock-marked hills to form the backdrop to his *The Passion of the Christ*.

But putting hype aside, people visiting Puglia and Basilicata tend to get besotted. As well as exploring the coast and the mountains, you can visit Baroque towns, seemingly goblin-built villages, powder-soft beaches, and coast through stunning scenery. Hospitality is sacred here, so you will be treated royally. Ebullient yet somehow reserved, the graceful people of the south will go out of their way to help you out and feed you up. But besides all this, you will feel like you are discovering something real – get here before anyone else finds out.

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Getting Started

Italy's lesser-known south has lately become deeply fashionable in the travel press, but on the ground its increased publicity means that you're likely to meet the odd foreign tourist rather than none. Its increased popularity does mean that facilities are ever improving (though it's long been popular with Italian tourists), and there are now more and more self-catering accommodation, interesting hotels and *agriturismi* (farm-stay accommodation) – for more on accommodation, see p202. Some places in Puglia and Basilicata are extremely seasonal, so this might affect when you choose to go (see below).

Italy is not particularly cheap, though it is less costly than, for example, the UK, Germany and France, and the south is generally much cheaper than the north. Puglia in particular is extremely family friendly. Italian families head here in droves over the summer precisely because it's ideal for a family holiday. The quiet country roads are easy to drive around and don't have the mad traffic that afflicts so much of the rest of the country. There is masses of self-catering accommodation, both independent and within holiday villages and hotels, aimed at families. It's also a bargain compared to the north and there are lovely beaches and lots of great activities to tire little ones out, such as cycling, swimming, horse riding, diving, sailing and so on.

The best way to get around is by car, though there are good bus and train connections between the main towns. It's just hard to explore remote areas – the Parco Nazionale del Pollino, for example – by public transport.

WHEN TO GO

In spring (around April to June), the countryside is a multicoloured tangle of spring flowers, fields are lush and green, the weather is warm and balmy, and Puglia and Basilicata are not overcrowded. September and even October are similarly uncrowded and good weatherwise. Most Italians hit the road in July and August, so those two months – in which prices soar, tempers flare,

RENTING A VILLA

A fantastic way to enjoy Italy is to rent a villa, apartment or cottage for a week or so – this often works out cheaper than a hotel, means you can settle down and relax, cook your own food (visiting the wonderful local markets for ingredients) and enjoy more space and privacy than most other kinds of accommodation. It's a particularly great option for families. Puglia has lots of converted *trulli*, the pointed-roof traditional houses in the countryside, which make for a unique – verging on the fairytale – stay. Useful websites for searching for accommodation include:

Holiday Homes in Italy (www.holidayhomesinitaly.co.uk)

Owners Direct (www.ownersdirect.co.uk)

Salento Dolce Vita (www.salentodolcevita.com)

Slow Travel (www.slowtrav.com)

Tuscany Now (www.tuscanynow.com)

Vamoose (www.vamoose.com)

Trulli specialists tend to have the worst puns and include:

Long Travel (www.long-travel.co.uk)

Trulli Italy in Puglia (www.trulliitalyinpuglia.com)

Trulli Land (www.trulliland.co.uk)

the country broils and resorts are packed – are not ideal for travel. However, if you have to travel then, don't despair, this is also the prime time for festivals and events and is incredibly lively – there are myriad nightly festivals in Puglia throughout August. Also, you can beat the heat by spending most of the day on the beach or by the pool and having long afternoon siestas. Easter and Christmas are also usually considered high season, with a mass of religious celebrations – those during Holy Week, leading up to Easter, are particularly spectacular.

Puglia and Basilicata's calendar of religious, local and food festivals, as well as cultural events, is busy year round, however; see p208 for more information.

In the low season (October to March) many hotels, B&Bs, activities operators and businesses close – towns around the Gargano coast are very quiet at this time, as are towns such as Otranto on the Salento coast and around Maratera. Ring ahead to book accommodation during these times, as your choice may not be open.

COSTS & MONEY

Puglia and Basilicata aren't cheap, although they are in the main cheaper than the north of Italy and very reasonable when compared with the UK and northern Europe. What you spend on accommodation (your single greatest expense) will depend on various factors, such as location, season (July and August see prices zoom up, particularly on the coast), the degree of comfort and luck. At the bottom end you will pay €14 to €20 at youth hostels, where meals generally cost €9. The cheapest *pensione* (small hotel) is unlikely to cost less than €40/60 for a basic single/double. You can stumble across comfortable rooms with charm and their own bathroom from €50 to €100 – particularly *agriturismi* and *masserie* (large farms or estates) in the countryside. The more expensive and luxurious converted *masserie* can easily cost from €150/200 to €200/400 for a single/double.

Eating out is just as variable. On average you should reckon on €20 to €40 for a full meal with house wine. For more details see p209.

A backpacker sticking religiously to youth hostels (though there are only a few in these regions) and cheap hotels, snacking at midday, sharing rooms and travelling slowly could scrape by on €45 to €60 per day. A midrange budget, including meals out or self-catering, sightseeing, travel and car hire, might come to around €100 to €150 per day. Top-end travellers could easily spend double that, or more – the bulk of the extra expenditure going on luxurious accommodation and meals at upmarket restaurants.

If you want to limit your expenses, you can do so by camping or staying in self-catering accommodation and shopping in markets, by spending your holiday on the beach, picnicking and sightseeing by just wandering around towns (to be recommended even if you're not on a budget) and visiting churches. Pizza is always a cheap (and kid-pleasing) option for an evening meal – a *margherita* (mozzarella and tomato-topped pizza) usually costs only around €2.50.

Public transport is reasonably priced, but car hire (p223) is fairly expensive (as is petrol) and is probably best arranged before leaving home. On trains you can save money by travelling on the slower *regionale* and *diretto* trains.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Travellers in the south of Italy have tended to strike out into the unknown far more than those in the north and the literature about Puglia and Basilicata reflects this spirit of adventure. Travelogues about these areas offer a particular insight into life here, with the older works providing a window

See Climate Charts (p205) for more information.

HOW MUCH?

Cappuccino at the bar
€0.90-1

Margherita pizza €2.50

Gelato €1-3

Glass of wine €2.50-3

City bus/tram ride €1

TOP 10

PUGLIA &
BASILICATA

Albani

TOP PROVERBS

There's an endless fount of wisdom in local dialects. This is a top 10 tip of the iceberg:

- 1 *A ddu muti iaddri cantanu, mai giurnu luce.* If there are many roosters in the chicken run, the day never starts.
- 2 *Chiuù forte chiove, chiuù prima scampa.* A heavy shower is better than slow rain.
- 3 *Li guai de la pignata, li sape lu cuperchiu.* Only the lid knows the pot's problems.
- 4 *Cuegghi l'acqua quando chiove.* Harvest the water when it's raining.
- 5 *Monte cu' monte 'nu se' 'cuntranu mai, omu cu' omu ci 'nu osce crai.* Only the mountains never meet each other, men sooner or later do.
- 6 *Quando lu ciucciu num 'bole 'mbive, magari 'ca fisci.* When the donkey doesn't want to drink, you can whistle as much as you want.
- 7 *Pietre meni an' cielu, an' capu toa stessu catenu.* Stones thrown in the sky will fall on your head.
- 8 *La figlia muta, sulu la mamma la capisce.* The daughter is silent, only the mother understands.
- 9 *Cuscenza e turnisi, 'nu se sape ci' 'nde tene.* Conscience and money, no-one knows who has it.
- 10 *Lu' purpu cu' l'acqua soa stessa se cocce.* The octopus is cooked by its own water.

TOP PASSEGGIATE

The evening stroll. It's the best way to pass the hours from dusk. Here are 10 of the best:

- 1 **Matera** (p167) Anyone and everyone makes their way to Piazza Vittorio Veneto in the gracious new town.
- 2 **Lecce** (p143) From Piazza d'Oronzo, down the mostly pedestrianised Corso Vittorio Emanuele, a balmy bustle amid golden baroque.
- 3 **Trani** (p73) Portside is where it's at, particularly in summer.
- 4 **Maratea Superiore** (p186) Summertime; the living is easy and it's time to wander up and down the main street.
- 5 **Bari** (p60) Throngs amble up and down the mostly pedestrianised, designer-shop-lined Via Sparano da Bari in the new town.
- 6 **Otranto** (p161) It might take time to make your way along Corso Garibaldi in the old town in summer, as your companions will be the world and his *moglie* (wife).
- 7 **Gallipoli** (p156) Great views are just one of the reasons to wander around the ramparts in the evening.
- 8 **Lucera** (p106) Flat-capped elderly gentlemen, gaggles of girls, redoubtable matrons; they're all thronging around the cathedral from dusk.
- 9 **Martina Franca** (p127) It's great to sally along the sidewalk in this most elegant of towns.
- 10 **Polignano a Mare** (p133) An enjoyable hubbub in this photogenic coastal town.

TOP CDS

For a highly selective sample of Pugliese and Basilican sounds, try the following music CDs:

- 1 **Lontano** (2003) Sud Sound System
- 2 **Comu na Petra** (1996) Sud Sound System
- 3 **La Banda** (1996) Banda Città Ruvo di Puglia
- 4 **Ballati Tutti Quanti Ballati Forte** (2000) Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino
- 5 **Andamenare** (2000) Tarantolati di Tricarico
- 6 **Mazzatte Pesanti** (2004) Aramirè
- 7 **Legend of the Italian Tarantella** (2002) Arakne Mediterranea
- 8 **Il Miracolo** (2003) & **Sangua Vivo** (2004) Officina Zoe
- 9 **Skuarrajazz** (2000) Uaragniaun
- 10 **La Musica Rubata** (2002) Banda Città di Montescaglioso ospite Ettore Fioravanti & Belcanto Group

into a vanished or vanishing world, which nevertheless still much informs the present.

A Traveller in Southern Italy (H V Morton) Travels around toe and heel just as the Autostrade del Sole extended south from Naples to Reggio di Calabria, exploring the then little-known regions and coastline. Vivid descriptions by a venerable reporter.

By the Ionian Sea: Notes of a Ramble in Southern Italy (George Gissing) The Victorian novelist's fascinating 1897 travels from Naples to Reggio di Calabria via Taranto and Metaponto.

Christ Stopped at Eboli (Carlo Levi) A wonderful book, fascinating and enduringly relevant. This describes the poverty and pettiness of village life, and is an account of the author's exile under the Fascists.

Heel to Toe (Charles Lister) Describing Lister's trip on a clapped-out moped; there are many gems – salacious and insightful – packed in among the evidence of how well read he is.

La Bella Vita: Life, Love and Food in Southern Italy (V Adamoli) Evokes life in Torre Saraena, a small southern Italian coastal town (featuring a seaside cinema) from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Old Calabria (Norman Douglas) Gay former diplomat (he left the service due to a sex scandal) describes his travels around southern Italy in the early 20th century.

Seasons in Basilicata: A Year in a Southern Italian Hill Village (David Yeadon) Warm-spirited if uneventful and verging on smug, this has some interesting titbits on Basilicata life.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Delicious Italy (www.deliciousitaly.com) Here's where to find that cooking course in Puglia, learn the recipe for Basilicata's walnut liqueur and indulge in fabulous food and wine without putting on any weight. Has accommodation listings too.

Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo (www.enit.it) The Italian national tourist body's website has information on everything from local tourist office addresses to gallery and museum details and general introductions to food, art and history.

i-escape (www.i-escape.com) Well-researched, authoritative accommodation website – ideal for finding boutique and special places to stay.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Can get you started with summaries on Italy, links to Italy-related sites and travellers trading information on the Thorn Tree.

QuiSalento (www.quisalento.it) A useful magazine (Italian only; available at newsstands) also has online information about events (festivals, cinema, concerts etc) in the Salento and links to other good Salento sites.

Salento Summer (www.salentosummer.com) Things to do in Salento, with accommodation listings.

Salentonet (www.salentonet.it) Good general website on the Salento, with information on some out-of-the-way places and accommodation listings.

Trenitalia (www.trenitalia.it) Plan train journeys, check timetables and prices and book tickets on Italy's national railway's website.

Trova Salento (www.trovasalento.it) Events, accommodation and restaurant listings, as well as information on local tours (Italian only).

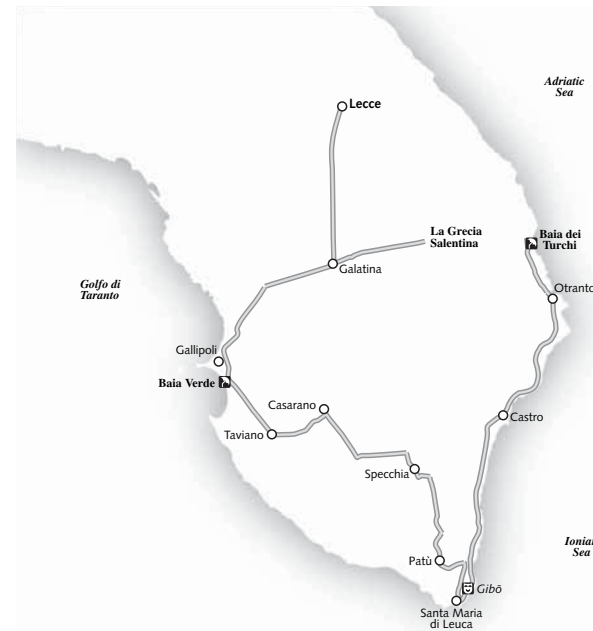
Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

SUMMER IN THE SALENTO

Three Weeks / Lecce to Otranto

The pace of life in the Salento is laid-back and leisurely and your itinerary should be too. **Lecce** (p143) itself can take a good week, especially if you sign up for a cookery course at **Awaiting Table** (p149). You'll also want to incorporate a couple of day trips to **Galatina** (p153) and **La Grecia Salentina** (p153), before coasting down to **Gallipoli** (p156) to gorge yourself on fish and check out the beach scene at **Baia Verde** (p157). From here you can dawdle southwards, stopping in **Taviano** (p160), **Casarano** (p160), **Specchia** (p160) and **Patù** (p160) before you hit **Santa Maria di Leuca** (p160). You'll want to spend a couple of days with **Smarè** (p160) in its sailing school or maybe bob around in boats in some of the fantastic grottoes. In the evening head for **Gibò** (p160) for cocktails and views. Then it's time to freewheel up the dramatic Adriatic Coast to **Castro** (p161), for more diving or head inland for some trekking along the macchia-covered hillsides, before finishing off in picturesque **Otranto** (p161) where you can collapse on the beautiful beaches of **Baia dei Turchi** (p164).



This itinerary meanders all over the Salento taking in its best beaches and curious towns. Ideally, try and plan your trip around a couple of festivals as these bring the small, sleepy Salentine towns to life. It's best enjoyed with your own car, especially outside summer when public transport is limited.

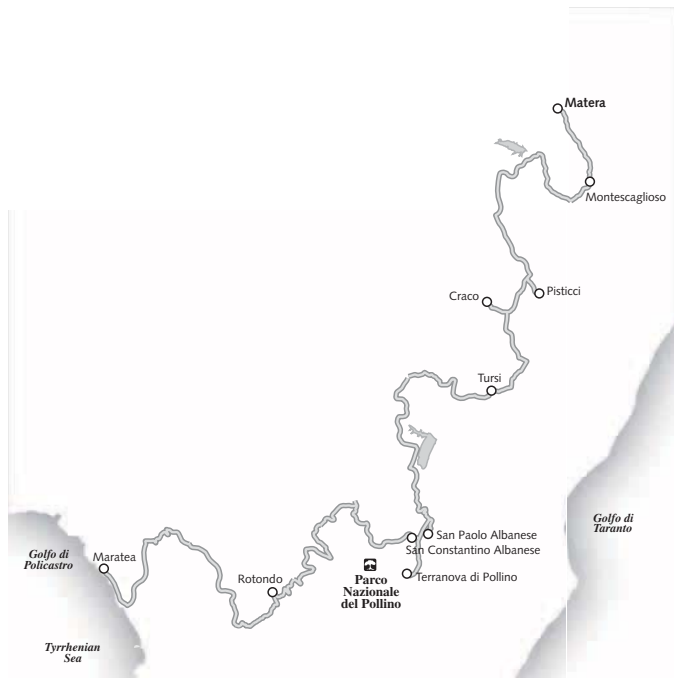
GHOSTS & WILD PLACES**Seven to 10 Days / Matera to Maratea**

Nature-lovers can start in the cave city of **Matera** (p167). After exploring the *sassi* (stone houses), check out the *chiese rupestri* on a hike along the Gravina or cycle through the beautiful rolling hills of the Murge to the medieval hilltop town of **Montescaglioso** (p175). Bed down in one of Matera's luxury cave hotels before heading southwest on the SS7 and the SS407 passing through the quaint hill town of **Pisticci** (p201) to spend a few spooky hours in the ghost-town of **Craco** (p200). Wind your way through olive groves, citrus orchards and vineyards to **Tursi** (p200) and its ancient Saracen rabatana quarter. Indulge in a poetic feast in the Palazzo dei Poeti before heading south to the **Parco Nazionale del Pollino** (p192) and a serious nature fix in Italy's largest national park.

Do the east side first. From **Terranova di Pollino** (p192), hike through pine woods and beech forest to Basilicata's highest peak, Monte Pollino. Dance to the *zampogne* in the tiny Albanian villages of **San Paolo Albanese** and **San Costantino Albanese** (p194). Skirt back to the SS104 and pick the long winding road through the west side of the park towards the main hub, **Rotondo** (p193). Stay in a cosy *agriturismo* for a few days until you've had your fill of hiking, cycling, horse riding and rafting. Don't leave without eye-balling the rare Bosnian pine tree, *pino loricato*.

Take the easy road to the A3, heading northwest to the dramatic Tyrrhenian coastline and pretty **Maratea** (p186) for coastal hikes, ocean swims and seafood feasts.

This 270km route through Basilicata's underbelly takes you from neolithic cave dwellings, spooky towns, wild forests and snowcapped mountains, to plunging coastal cliffs and black-sand beaches. You'll need your own car, but the roads are generally good and traffic is light. Hiking fiends might find it hard to leave the Pollino!

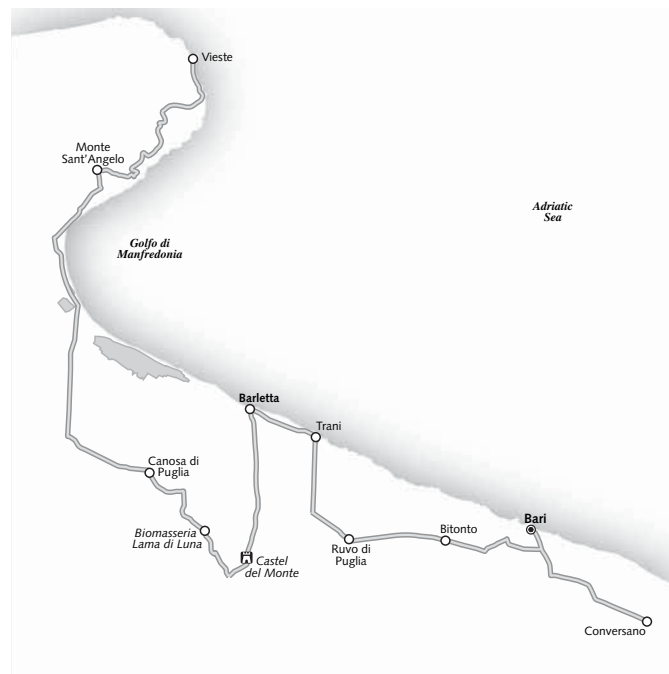
**CASTLES, CHURCHES & CRUSADERS****Two Weeks / Bari to Monte Sant'Angelo**

Northern Puglia with its huge crusader castles and secretive caves has a very different flavour to the sunny south. Its heart is dynamic **Bari** (p60), with its ancient historic centre, huge basilica and chaotic **Festa di San Nicola** (p66). From here, the city is surrounded by historic towns like **Conversano** (p119), **Bitonto** (p71) and **Ruvo di Puglia** (p72), which boasts one of the finest archaeological museums in Puglia, the **Museo Nazionale Jatta** (p72).

Further north, elegant **Trani** (p73) sits jewel-like on the coast, the most elegant of Bari's towns. Beyond, brutish **Barletta** (p76) can't really compare, but it does have one of the biggest castles in the province and an intriguing art gallery, the **Pinacoteca di Giuseppe de Nittis** (p77), housed in the lovely Palazzo della Marra. Frederick II set off on the Third Crusade from here and not far away you'll find his most concrete imperial statement, the stunning **Castel del Monte** (p80).

Make a base for yourself at the lovely **Biomasseria Lama di Luna** (p82) where you can make your own pizza and explore the nearby vineyards and towns. More history awaits in **Canosa di Puglia** (p80), one of Rome's most important towns along the Via Appia Traiana. Along this road pilgrims and crusaders have trudged for centuries, passing under the enormous Arco Traiano. Many of them came from the Gargano, where they will have stopped at **Monte Sant'Angelo** (p95), one of the most important crusader shrines in Puglia, and still a place of thronging pilgrims today.

If that seems like a lot of sightseeing then finish off with a few lazy days on the beaches at **Vieste** (p88).



This relatively short itinerary is packed with history. There's a greater concentration of people and towns here so public transport is relatively good and you can get to most places by bus or train. To get the most out of this trip it's worth swotting up on some crusading history before you go.

TAILORED TRIPS

COLOURS OF THE GARGANO

Slip into beach gear, slop on sunscreen and you're set for the Gargano's sun-and-sand spectacular in the dazzling blue waters of the Adriatic. The spur's best beaches lay between **Vieste** (p88) and **Mattinata** (p99). Do the five-star thing at **Zagare Bay** (p100) or go au naturel at **Vignanotica** (p89). Closer to the party scene is Vieste's **Spiaggia del Castello** (p89) while **Punta Lunga** (p89) attracts

the international windsurfing crowd. Paddle a kayak along the craggy coastline and find your own secret coves and stunning sea caves or go completely under on a scuba-diving trip to the **Isole Tremiti** (p102).

After a juicy seafood platter in a *trabucco* (ancient fishing trap) near **Peschici** (p92), swap the beach-scene for an ecofriendly green scene. Hikers will find plenty of trails in the Bavarian-esque splendour of the **Foresta Umbra** (p87). Hire a mountain bike or join a bike tour and take a week to explore the national park's natural and cultural highlights, picking olives and sleeping in quaint *agriturismi*. Don't forget to pack the binoculars for an afternoon of bird-watching on the **Lesina lakes** (p95).



PRANZO WITH A DIFFERENCE

Food is serious business in the south. It's the social glue that holds everyone together. Most Italians look with nostalgia on the traditional cooking and fresh produce that you'll find here, so tuck that napkin in and get started! The Murgia Plateau with its rich history of farming harbours some of Puglia's finest restaurants, including **Il Frantoio** (p132), **Cibus** (p132) and **Falso Pepe** (p117). You'll also find they do a nice bottle of white wine around **Locorotondo** (p126), and **Noci** (p122) is well known for its endless foodie festivals.

Further south in **Manduria** (p118) you'll find the rich red Primitivo wine and across the border in Basilicata the award-winning Aglianico from **Rionero di Vulture** (p182). You'll meet it time and again in **Matera** (p167), where you should also sample the pasta with some pepperoni cruschi.

The soft peaty soil of the Parco Nazionale del Pollino yields some delicious mushrooms, game meats, salami and cheeses which you'll sample well at Ristorante Luna Rossa in **Terranova di Pollino** (p194). Other well-known centres for country cooking are **Minervino Murge** (p81) and nearby **Montegrosso** (p82), as well as **Ruvo di Puglia** (p72).

Seafood fans need not fear, however, with so much coastline you won't be missing out on the fruits of the sea. Puglia, in particular, is fish mad. **The Gargano** (p86) and **Taranto** (p111) are home to some of the best seafood restaurants in the province, although **Maratea** (p186) has a few select options as well.



The Authors



PAULA HARDY **Coordinating Author; Itineraries; History; Bari & the Terra di Bari; Taranto & the Murgia; Brindisi & the Salento; Transport**

A peripatetic childhood between various African countries and Europe led Paula inevitably to guidebook writing and to an enduring fascination with the Mediterranean, that mini-sea from which so much culture and history have evolved. For the last five years she has heroically endured thousands of dishes of pasta, braved exploding volcanoes and worshipped faithfully at the altar of the sun god in the process of researching Lonely Planet guides to Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Andalucia and Morocco. When not struggling to work off the worst excesses of the Italian table, Paula can be found commissioning Italy books and daydreaming of southern skies in Lonely Planet's London office.



ABIGAIL HOLE **Destination Puglia & Basilicata; Getting Started; The Culture; Food & Wine; Directory**

From London, Abigail moved to Hong Kong in 1997, returning in 2000 to begin a stint editing books in Lonely Planet's London office. She started to write Lonely Planet guidebooks in 2002. Two years later, she visited Rome for a month and liked it so much she stayed, working on Lonely Planet's *Best of Rome* and *Rome* guides and producing articles and podcasts on Italy. Abigail is a true Italian mamma with two *mezzo*-Pugliese sons, and *la famiglia* divide their time between London, Rome and Puglia. Her other travel journalism includes pieces for the *Guardian*, *Marie Claire*, *Wanderlust* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.



OLIVIA POZZAN **Environment; Northern Puglia & the Gargano Promontory; Northern Basilicata; Southern Basilicata**

Raised on pasta and rough red in a small Australian coastal town, Olivia didn't appreciate her Italian heritage until a discover-your-roots trip to the Veneto. Since then Italy has been a favourite destination. Having studied veterinary science she spent a few years chasing cattle in the Outback before somehow landing in the Middle East as the livestock vet for an Arabian prince. When not hiking in the world's most exotic places she lives the beach lifestyle on the Sunshine Coast, contributing to outdoor mags, writing books on alternative therapies and keeping fit as a personal trainer.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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