

Brindisi & the Salento



After Sicily and Sardinia, the Penisola Salentina (Salentine Peninsula) is considered by some to be the third island of Italy. It is hot, dry, cut off and remote, retaining a real flavour of its Greek past. Here the lush greenery of the Valle d'Itria gives way to ochre-coloured fields hazy with wildflowers and immense olive groves. And amid the cacti and the crickets you'll find Messapic, Greek and Roman relics popping up alongside much older menhirs and dolmens.

But it's not all dry sierras and sunny beaches; go inland and you'll find the beautiful city of Lecce, nicknamed the Florence of Puglia, for its heritage of highbrow scholarship and crazy carved churches. Its baroque elegance is echoed throughout the region, from big towns like Galatina and Gallipoli to tiny villages like Specchia.

Until quite recently the Salento was a poor and isolated region, as you can see in Eduardo Winspeare's film *Il Miracolo*, but with flash new neighbours in town like Lord MacAlpine and Helen Mirren, this southern outpost is enjoying a cultural renaissance as more and more people head south to savour its intriguing traditions and ancient history.

Add to this Italy's finest beaches (six of them blue-flag approved), almost endless sunshine and a general desire to party all night to musical styles as varied as *pizzica* and house, and you can see why the Italians have been keeping the Salento something of a secret.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Make new friends and learn to cook Pugliese at Lecce's **Awaiting Table** (p149) amid the town's legendary baroque extravagance
- Go crazy and dance like you've been bitten by a tarantula at Melpignano's **Notte della Taranta** (p153) or remember Otranto's 800 martyrs at the **Festa dei Martiri Idruntini** (p163)
- Dive the rock caves around **Santa Caterina** (p156) and eat fish so fresh it's actually raw in **Gallipoli** (p159)
- Party hard at **Gibò** (p160), near Santa Maria di Leuca, and sleep off the night's excesses on the white sandy beaches of **Marina di Pescoluse** (p160)
- Spend a lazy day sailing up the Adriatic coast visiting sea caves and sunbathing on the deck of one of the beautiful boats from **Smarè** (p160) in Santa Maria di Leuca
- Scuba dive in the grottoes of **Castro** (p161) or trek inland amid the *maquis*-covered hillsides of the Adriatic Coast



BRINDISI

pop 87,900

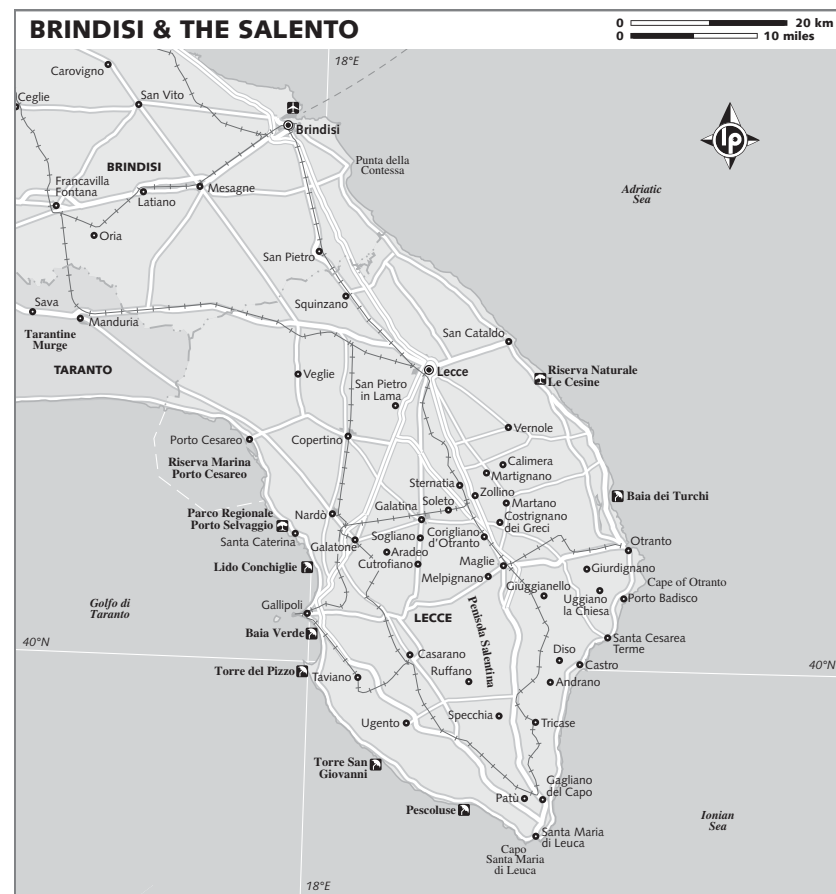
Brindisi is no stranger to fame. It has been southern Italy's busiest merchant and passenger port for centuries. It was the end of the ancient Roman road, Via Appia, down whose weary length trudged legionnaires and pilgrims, crusaders and traders, all heading to Greece and the Near East. Then it was the main terminus for the Indian Mail Route, a business that brought a steady stream of 19th-century society to the city's doorstep.

With a colourful past, Brindisi is searching for its soul in the 21st century. Sure it is southern Italy's busiest port – in summer about 1000

tourists transit through the city every day – but somehow that hasn't made it the focal point it should be and it continues to languish in Bari's shadow. Also, the city is struggling to discard a bad reputation – stories about thieves and touts have plagued Brindisi for years, but in reality the palm-planted *corso* is very pleasant, but there is simply very little to do.

HISTORY

There is a great scene in the film *Spartacus*, where Kirk Douglas enthusiastically exclaims to sidekick Tony Curtis that they are 'off to the Roman city of Brundisium!' And there, where the Appian Way meets the port, ships would lie waiting to take Spartacus and his great army of freed slaves off to Greece.





Well, history (and Hollywood) have taught us that Spartacus got double-crossed in Brundisium: there were no ships waiting, and ultimately the end of the Appian Way was lined not with gold, but with crucified bodies. The city may predate that Roman heyday by several centuries, but it was the Romans who transformed it into a major centre of commerce and naval power. In subsequent centuries the city was destroyed by the Lombards (674), but such a fine natural harbour couldn't be left to go to waste so the city was soon rebuilt and later captured by the Normans (1070), who used it as the main embarkation point for their Crusades. Between 1096 and 1228 six Crusades departed from Brindisi.

But plague (1348 and 1456) and conquest were to take the edge off things following Frederick II's death in 1250, as Brindisi passed in quick succession from the Angevins to the Austrians and then the Bourbons. The city's fortunes were only resurrected in 1869 with the opening of the Suez Canal, when the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company chose Brindisi as one of its termini for the Indian Mail Route. From 1871 to 1914, travellers once again journeyed the length of Europe to Brindisi where ships departed every Sunday for Port Said, Bombay and Calcutta.

Unfortunately, Brindisi's days on the mail route were numbered as war loomed, and in 1914 the mail company moved to Marseille, which was altogether safer. Given the bombings

INFORMATION	SLEEPING	DRINKING
Appia Travel.....1 D2	Grande Albergo.....13 C2	Big Ben.....23 B3
Hellenic Mediterranean Lines.....2 C3	Internazionale.....14 D3	Pub Aragonese.....24 C1
Libreria.....3 C3	Hotel Altair.....15 C4	
Post Office.....4 C3	Hotel Colonna.....16 C3	SHOPPING
Tourist Office.....5 C1	Hotel Orientale.....17 C2	Supermarket.....25 D2
Webmaniacs.....6 D3		
	EATING	TRANSPORT
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	Betty's Bar.....18 C3	Boats to Monument of Italian Sailors.....26 C1
Cathedral.....7 C2	Braceria Escosazio.....19 C3	Buses for Costa Morena.....27 D2
Monument to Italian Sailors.....8 D1	La Cantina ti L'Artisti.....20 C3	FSE & STP Bus Stops.....28 B4
Museo Archeologico.....9 C2	Trattoria da 'Vito'.....21 D3	Marmara Lines.....29 C3
Roman Column.....10 C2	Trattoria.....22 C2	Old Ferry Terminal.....30 D3
Tempio di San Giovanni al Sepolcro.....11 C2		Skenderbeg Lines.....31 D3
		STP Ticket Office.....32 B4

Brindisi took in WWI it proved a good decision. Over 207 missions left its harbour during the war, earning the city the Military Cross of Honour. WWII brought more of the same, causing much damage to the historic centre until the city was finally occupied by Allied troops in September 1943 and Brindisi became the temporary capital of Italy for six months.

In the 1990s a new set of international organisations recognised the strategic benefits of Brindisi's port and the Office of the UN and the World Food Organisation set up camp in the disused sector of Brindisi's military airport. This time, however, they're sending emergency rations rather than warships.

ORIENTATION

Brindisi is built on a peninsula between two landlocked bays, the Seno di Ponente on the northwest and the Seno di Levante on the east.

From the train station Corso Roma and then Corso Garibaldi leads to Piazza Vittoria Emanuele, which faces the inner harbour and was once the location of the old port. To the east, in the bleak industrial wilderness of Costa Morena, is the new port (Stazione Marittima), while to the left the Viale Regina Margherita leads around the peninsula to the Castello Svevo.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Libreria (☎ 0831 56 20 47; Corso Garibaldi 38a; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) A small bookshop with a limited selection, but plenty of guidebooks.

Emergency

Police Station (☎ 0831 54 31 11; Via Bastioni San Giacomo)

Internet Access

Webmaniacs (☎ 0831 52 15 32; Vico Sacramento; per hr €3.50; ☎ 9.15am-8.15pm) New centre with fast computers.

Internet Resources

Brindisi Web (www.brindisiweb.com) A nonprofit website with everything you need to know about Brindisi.

Medical Services

First Aid (☎ 0831 52 14 10)

Hospital (☎ 0831 53 71 11; SS7 for Mesagne) Southwest of the centre.

Money

Corso Umberto I and Corso Garibaldi bristle with currency-exchange offices and banks. It's more reliable to change money at the banks.

Post

Post office (☎ 0831 47 11 11; Piazza Vittoria; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 0831 52 30 72; Viale Regina Margherita 44; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-9pm Sat, plus 5-9pm Sun Jul & Aug) A sleepy tourist office, but helpful nonetheless.

Travel Agencies

Appia Travel (☎ 0831 52 16 84; Viale Regina Margherita 8/9; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) A reputable agency in a convenient location. Here you can book ferries, trains and long-distance bus trips.

UTAC Viaggi (☎ 0831 52 49 21; Via Bastioni San Giacomo 70; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Another reliable agency. The website has good info on Greece.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Since the break-up of Yugoslavia and the advent of war in Iraq, Italy's Adriatic ports