

PUGLIA

CATHEDRALS, CASTLES, TOWERS



[ENG]

PUGLIA

Cathedrals, castles, towers

Puglia is an age-old land traversed by centuries of history and art that have left their unmistakable mark on the imposing architecture: from the Classic Age to the present day, from the Romanesque to the Baroque. But Puglia's history starts even before history, as the refined historian and exceptional traveler Cesare Brandi wrote. This is shown by the dolmens and menhirs bearing witness to prehistoric civilizations. A journey through the region reveals the differences between a north with its ancient Daunian and Medieval Latin tradition evoked by castles and monasteries, and a south influenced by Magna Graecia and Byzantine rule. If we were to travel through Puglia by air, we would take it all in from above. Imposing Romanesque cathedrals and majestic castles from the times of Frederick the Great soar to the sky, amid enchanting villages and breathtaking landscapes. The coastline is dominated by silent towers built over the centuries by Normans, Swabians, and Angevins, while the Baroque churches of Lecce and Martina Franca lend charm with their stone crenellations. From here, we lose ourselves in the magic of the valley of the trulli, before arriving in Taranto, the realm of Greek art. It is a land of enigmas and ancestral rites, of sweet and sour flavors, of generous wines, of captivating dance, of welcoming smiles, and of places of the heart. This meditative, wondrous journey starts by reading this guide for hints and recommendations, and continues in Puglia itself, offering us our fill of a light that warms the soul, of crystal-clear water that refreshes the body, and of a slow way of living, in which we can enjoy the landscape right down to its roots.



THE FASCINATION OF STONE SPIRITUAL PUGLIA

A secret Puglia? It is discovered by observing the landscape as we set off for the more renowned places. A world of bare rock, with retreats perched on cliffs, like the mill near the **Pulsano Abbey**, and imposing rupestrian crypts from San Michele in **Gravina in Puglia** to Lama d'Antico in **Fasano**, with a high concentration in the gravine of Bari and Taranto, and in Salento. Men of faith, farmers and shepherds prayed in these transformed caves, in about the year 1000, in chapels frescoed with Christ Pantocrator, saints, Madonnas, and archangels, like the crypt of Santa Cristina in **Carpi gnano Salentino**. Then there are the spectacular white-stone cathedrals set ablaze at sunset. The most well known is San Nicola in **Bari**, while the most evocative is the one dedicated to St. Nicholas the Pilgrim in **Trani** (see photo), suspended over the sea, like San Corrado in **Molfetta**. In these masterworks of Apulian Romanesque art, the fine inlays of the doors and rose windows show a blend of influences from the Arab, Jewish, and Syrian worlds, as does the Cathedral of the Assumption in **Troia**. Built between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many during the reign of Frederick II, they are a continuous discovery from north to south. From **Altamura**, **Bitonto** and **Andria** to

Ruvo di Puglia, **Giovinazzo**, **Conversano**, and **Ostuni**, and then in Salento there are two masterpieces: Santa Annunziata in **Otranto** and the Basilica of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria in **Galatina**. Last comes the Baroque explosion, with its sumptuous excesses, its redundancy of statues and fantastic decor, carved into the soft, cream-colored stone: acanthus leaves climbing up spiral columns, leaping putti, floral motifs and mythological animals. Starting in the mid-sixteenth century, after the Battle of Lepanto, the Church, through the Jesuits, Theatines, and Celestines, intended to make Puglia the bulwark of Catholicism, and this exuberant architectural style took hold in Lecce and in the whole region: from the Addolorata Church in **Foggia** to the Shrine of Maria Santissima del Soccorso in **San Severo**; from the Madonna delle Grazie in **Gravina in Puglia** to Santa Maria in Betlem in **Mesagne**, – not to mention **Martina Franca**, **Nardò** and **Galatone**. Baroque achieves its apotheosis in the splendid Santa Croce Basilica in **Lecce**. There is also a sense of theater in religious rituals and in the **Living Passions** that come to life during the Easter period in Troia, Conversano, Alberobello, Ginosà, Taranto, Francavilla Fontana, Oria, Maglie, and Gallipoli.



BOLD, TIMELESS FORTRESSES

Puglia is a land of castles and cathedrals, all imposing and mostly the artistic expression of that genius loci that marked Frederick II, puer apuliae – the boy of Puglia. The surprising journey in search of Frederick's architecture starts in places where nature was once lush and permitted the much-loved hunting with falcons. In Capitanata, there are many to be found, from **Lucera** with the large Palatium, to the majestic Ducal castle of Bovino; Gargano boasts the Swabian castle of **Vieste**, a small jewel soaring over the sea, and the **Monte Sant'Angelo** manor, with a 360° panorama. Further south is the enigmatic **Castel del Monte** (see photo), atop a 500-meter hill, then the Norman-Swabian castle of **Bari** and that of **Gioia del Colle**, a royal dwelling with 100 doors, it is told. And then it's on to **Gravina in Puglia**; atop the hill, the imposing ruins of the hunting castle may be seen. From here, the view ranges towards the Murgia and the Calabrian mountains. In the Medieval village of **Oria**, we admire the exterior of the splendid castle that took center stage in Frederick II's marriage to Yolande of Brienne, which is recreated in mid-August in a famed historical procession – **Torneo dei Rioni** – with nearly one thousand re-creators.

Along the 865 kilometers of coastline, we discover the **magical towers** that stand alone and scan the horizon – silent companions of those opting for an alternative, coast-to-coast journey. Starting from the **Capitanata** area towards **Salento**, the temptation to pull over to the side of the road to photograph them is irresistible. The Kingdom of Naples boasted nearly 400 of them, 150 of which in Puglia alone. Although the Ancient Romans were the first to build them, the current ones date to the Spanish period, ordered by Charles V in the sixteenth century to better defend the kingdom from marauding pirates and Saracens. They served mostly to keep lookout over the coasts. This is why they were small, square or round in layout, alternating on the Ionian side with imposing towers that functioned as command stations, where men were gathered and goods stowed.

"A journey in Puglia
is a journey
across a continent
of Ancient History".

Cesare Brandi
La Puglia by Francesco Varzi



INDEX OF ITINERARIES

- ▶ Itinerary 1
One step from heaven
 From Lesina to Vieste and the Tremiti Islands
 From Rignano Garganico to Siponto

10
- ▶ Itinerary 2
Between the sacred and the profane
 From Foggia to San Severo

20
- ▶ Itinerary 3
The Emperor's Legacy
 From Barletta to Ruvo di Puglia

28
- ▶ Itinerary 4
The Triumph of Romanesque
 From Molfetta to Conversano

36
- ▶ Itinerary 5
Churches hidden in the rocks
 From Gravina in Puglia to Grottaglie

48
- ▶ Itinerary 6
Microcosm of Art
 From Savanelletri Fasano to Martina Franca

58
- ▶ Itinerary 7
Baroque Embroidery
 From Brindisi to Ruffano

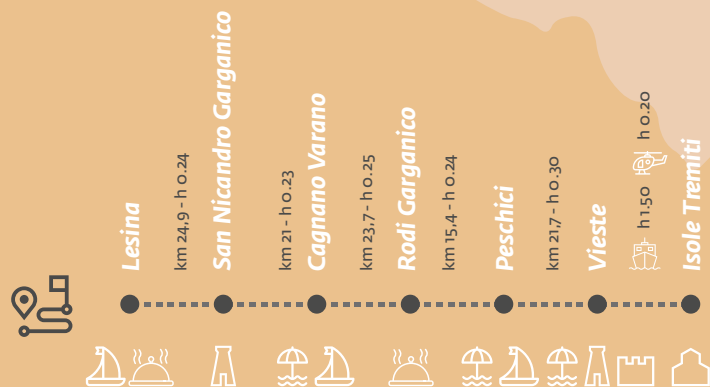
66
- ▶ Itinerary 8
Breathtaking towers and castles
 From Acaya to San Pietro in Bevagna

78



	Rupestrian Churches		Natural areas
	Romanesque Cathedrals		Beaches
	Baroque Churches		Trekking
	Pilgrimage routes		On horseback
	Archaeological sites		In flight
	Towers		By boat
	Castles		Food
	Museums		Wine
	Events		Regional network Info-Point

Itinerary 1 - One step from heaven



GARGANO

"If it is night like this one,
and if the sky
is so full of stars (...)
you can listen
to the darkness
and see the silence."

Lucio Dalla
Tutto Gargano 2000



LENGTH OF ITINERARY
Km 107 + 65



DURATION
5 - 7 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR
those who love silence
and spirituality, immerse themselves in nature,
and explore the sea

Rignano Garganico

km 17.3 - h o.27

S. Giovanni Rotondo

km 25.8 - h o.31

Monte Sant'Angelo

km 16.8 - h o.26

Manfredonia

km 5 - h o.11

Siponto





Itinerary 1

ONE STEP FROM HEAVEN

There are two possible itineraries in Gargano: one towards the sea to discover villages perched on the rocks, and the other in **Gargano National Park**, following sacred roads. Towards Lakes **Lesina** and **Varano**, we may admire lookout towers, such as **Torre Mileto** in **San Nicandro Garganico** and along the coastline, amid coves and the fishing machines known as trabucchi; after **Rodi Garganico** and **Peschici** we come to **Vieste**, where **Torre San Felice** and the Swabian castle rise. By sea or helicopter, we reach the **Tremiti Islands**, and, on the island of **San Nicola** (see photo) stroll amid towers, city walls and cloisters to the Church of Santa Maria a Mare, home to a twelfth-century cross. From **Rignano Garganico** along the **Via Sacra Langobardorum**, we visit **San Giovanni Rotondo** for a prayer at the tomb of Padre Pio in the immense Church designed by Renzo Piano, and then reach the retreats of the **Pulsano Abbey** and the Shrine of Saint Michael the Archangel at **Monte Sant'Angelo**, a **UNESCO** site since 2011. Then comes a tasty stop to savor the filled wafers and excellent bread, before visiting the Norman Castle. In **Manfredonia** we visit the Swabian-Angevin Castle at Museo Archeologico Nazionale, and in nearby **Siponto** we admire the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore and the Abbey of San Leonardo in Lama Volara – both splendid examples of Apulian Romanesque.



MONTE SANT'ANGELO

Abbey of Santa Maria di Pulsano

A place of contemplation and mysticism, all around there are 24 retreats hidden in the mountains, linked by paths and stairways. Set amid rocks and 200-meter precipices, the Abbey was rebuilt in the twelfth century by Saint John of Matera, who founded the Congregation of the Hermits of Pulsano: the last hermit died in 1959. Since 1997, a community of Benedictine monks has lived there. Inside, **Scuola di formazione permanente in iconografia** offers lessons to learn the symbology and meaning of this sacred art, and teaches how to transcribe icons, in accordance with age-old painting techniques. ⓘ [Monte Sant' Angelo](https://montesantangelo.it) +39 0884562062, [Info](mailto:info@montesantangelo.it) +39 0884561047, abbaziadipulsano.org

INTERESTING FACTS

GARGANO BY HORSE

An unusual experience, in Gargano it is more unique still. One discovers sights and glimpses otherwise hard to see, enveloped by the wild beauty of **Parco Nazionale del Gargano** and **Foresta Umbra**. We traverse Giganti del Bosco, the age-old beech forest and a **UNESCO** heritage site, plus pastures and stands of oak. We climb the mountains, sleep in tents in the open air, and stop at the farmhouse for a tasty sampling of cheeses, fruit preserves, and traditional dishes.

ⓘ [Manfredonia](https://manfredonia.it) +39 0884581998, parcogargano.it

MONTE SANT'ANGELO

Sanctuary of San Michele Arcangelo

An impassable grotto, where the Archangel Michael is said to have appeared in the fifth century, becomes holy for all of Christendom, an obligatory destination for the Crusades and pilgrims from all over Europe, and a **UNESCO** Heritage Site since 2011. We climb the 89 steps of the imposing thirteenth-century Angevin staircase and, after the atrium and the splendid Romanesque portal, we enter the sacred grotto with evocative crypts from the Lombard period. ⓘ [Monte Sant'Angelo](https://montesantangelo.it) +39 0884562062, [Info](mailto:info@montesantangelo.it) +39 0884561150, santuariosanmichele.it

INTERESTING FACTS

THE SACRED LINE OF SAINT MICHAEL

Departing from **Monte Sant'Angelo** is one of the straight lines that unite together holy places of strong symbolism. This is the Sacred Line of Saint Michael, according to legend the sword blow inflicted by the saint upon Satan, to hurl him back to Hell. This invisible line connects seven monasteries, from Skelling in Ireland to Stella Maris on Mount Carmel in Haifa, touching the three most important in between: Mont Saint Michel in France, the Sacra di San Michele in Val di Susa, and the Sanctuary of Monte Sant'Angelo in Gargano, all equidistant from one another. Every June 21, the line is perfectly aligned with the setting sun.



MONTE SANT'ANGELO

Norman Castle

Not far from the Sanctuary of San Michele Arcangelo, a holy and evocative place, the imposing castle appears. It boasts more than a millennium of history, from Ursus I, Bishop of Benevento, who had it built in 837, to the Normans who built Torre Quadrata ("square tower") and reconstructed Torre dei Giganti ("tower of the giants"), where we may see the knot of Solomon or the lotus flower – symbols reminiscent of the Templars. With the Swabians, it became one of the privileged castra. Here, Charles III, King of Naples and Hungary was born, and the Swabian princess Phiipa of Antioch and Queen Joanna were imprisoned. We enter inside the towers and stroll along the scenic walkways with views from Gargano to the Tavoliere. Particularly impressive are the interior rooms, such as that of **Frederick II's treasury**, where temporary exhibitions are held.

📍 **Monte Sant'Angelo** +39 0884562062



MANFREDONIA

Swabian/Angevin Castle

A visit to the imposing castle begun by Manfred of Swabia and completed by Charles of Anjou is a must. The landscape may be admired on a lovely stroll atop the perimeter wall. Until the restorations and new organization are completed, visit the Piazza d'Armi and a room in **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** displaying a fragment of the rich collection of Daunian steles, and archaeological finds of weapons, vases, and jewels. 📍 **Manfredonia** +39 0884581998

SIPONTO

The Basilicas and the Archaeological Park

San Leonardo in Lama Volara is a fascinating abbey. The monastic complex, founded around the year 1000 by the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, was a shelter for pilgrims visiting the Sanctuary of the Archangel Michael, and for knights on the Crusades. *Info +39 0884549439, sanleonardomanfredonia.it*

DON'T MISS

21
JUN

Every year, on the summer solstice, at 12:58 PM, inside **San Leonardo in Lama Volara**, the light filters from a gnomic hole, an 11-petal rose placed beneath the church's vault; at the moment the sun is at its zenith, it projects a beam of light inside that gradually rests upon the cross carved into the floor.

Rising alongside is the **Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore**, with two churches atop one another: the upper one upon Roman foundations, with a square plan and a central dome, and an Early Christian sarcophagus that serves as a mensa for the upper altar. The lower one, from the eleventh century, is divided by 4 columns and 16 small columns with Romanesque capitals. Since 2016, an evanescent metal mesh installation by the artist Edoardo Tresoldi has risen beside it. The work reconstructs the Early Christian Basilica with an embroidery of 4,500 square meters of mesh, 14 meters in height – the world's tallest.

Info +39 0884541470



Coastal Towers

The light is right, as are the colors of the sea in the brightest blues and greens, plus the towers – the undisputed stars in the natural landscape: it is hard not to take pictures. They served to spot those approaching Puglia's coast and to transmit signals to neighboring towers to defend against Saracen attacks. Starting from the north, near Lesina, we may admire the austere **Torre Mileto** in **San Nicandro Garganico**, with its corners oriented towards the cardinal points and, further east, **Torre San Felice in Vieste** (see photo), which dominates the bay by that name, and the famed Architiello extending into the sea.



Itinerary 2 - *Between the sacred and the profane*



DAUNIA

"It was a silence
shod in green sandals
and with the forehead
of an ancient soldier (those dark soldiers
whose lips, in the shoving of the ranks,
form unexpected words
of a simple grandeur)".

Vittorio Bodini
Tutte le poesie



LENGTH OF ITINERARY
Km 302



DURATION
5 - 7 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR
those who love Medieval villages,
age-old stories,
and uncontaminated landscapes

Roseto Valfortore

km 9,8 - h 0.17

Alberona

km 37,2 - h 0.39

Pietramontecorvino

km 22,7 - h 0.23

Lucera

km 20 - h 0.24

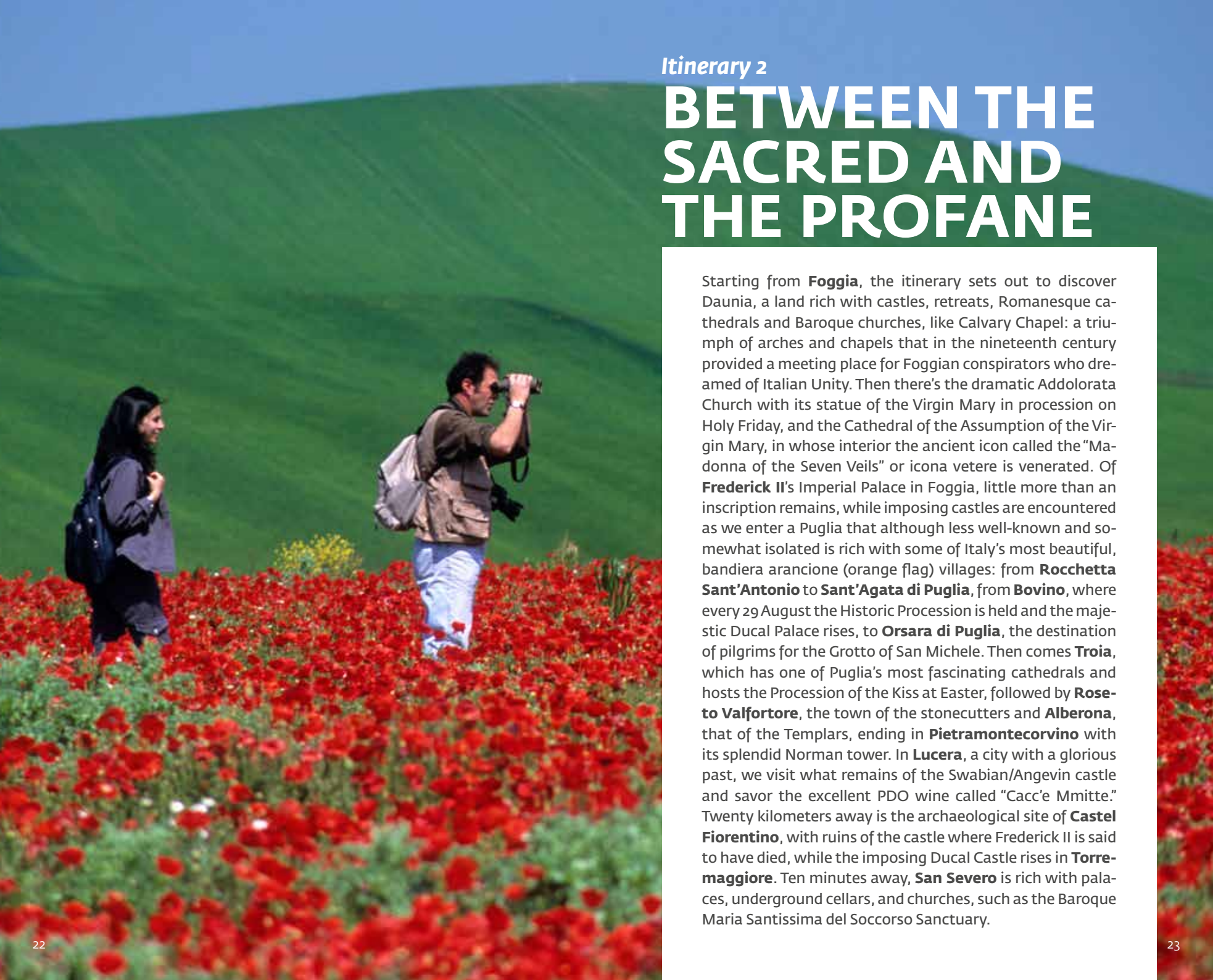
Castel Fiorentino

km 15,8 - h 0.18

Torremaggiore

km 7,9 - h 0.12

San Severo

A woman and a man are walking through a field of vibrant red poppies. The woman, on the left, is wearing a dark jacket and a backpack. The man, on the right, is wearing a light-colored shirt, light blue pants, and a backpack, and is holding binoculars to his eyes. They are standing on a green hillside that slopes upwards towards the right. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

Itinerary 2

BETWEEN THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

Starting from **Foggia**, the itinerary sets out to discover Daunia, a land rich with castles, retreats, Romanesque cathedrals and Baroque churches, like Calvary Chapel: a triumph of arches and chapels that in the nineteenth century provided a meeting place for Foggian conspirators who dreamed of Italian Unity. Then there's the dramatic Addolorata Church with its statue of the Virgin Mary in procession on Holy Friday, and the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, in whose interior the ancient icon called the "Madonna of the Seven Veils" or icona vetere is venerated. Of **Frederick II's** Imperial Palace in Foggia, little more than an inscription remains, while imposing castles are encountered as we enter a Puglia that although less well-known and somewhat isolated is rich with some of Italy's most beautiful, bandiera arancione (orange flag) villages: from **Rocchetta Sant'Antonio** to **Sant'Agata di Puglia**, from **Bovino**, where every 29 August the Historic Procession is held and the majestic Ducal Palace rises, to **Orsara di Puglia**, the destination of pilgrims for the Grotto of San Michele. Then comes **Troia**, which has one of Puglia's most fascinating cathedrals and hosts the Procession of the Kiss at Easter, followed by **Roseto Valfortore**, the town of the stonecutters and **Alberona**, that of the Templars, ending in **Pietramontecorvino** with its splendid Norman tower. In **Lucera**, a city with a glorious past, we visit what remains of the Swabian/Angevin castle and savor the excellent PDO wine called "Cacc'e Mmitte." Twenty kilometers away is the archaeological site of **Castel Fiorentino**, with ruins of the castle where Frederick II is said to have died, while the imposing Ducal Castle rises in **Torremaggiore**. Ten minutes away, **San Severo** is rich with palaces, underground cellars, and churches, such as the Baroque Maria Santissima del Soccorso Sanctuary.

TROIA

Cathedral of the Assumption

It is 900 years old, with a rose window of Islamic manufacture that is unique in the world. The 11 columns that start from the center meet in a play of arches that make a frame, creating a movement of carvings and lacework one different from the other. It is so beautiful that it could be seen on the 5,000 lire banknotes with Alessandro da Messina on the front, printed from 1979 to 1983. Its bronze door is divided into 28 parts with tales of all kinds, and stories of Saints and Bishops. Also beautiful is the fresco recounting the Dormitio Mariae and the ambon of Saint Basil. The annexed **Museo del Tesoro della Cattedrale** holds silver, parchments, and precious exsultets, such as those with the Easter chants and illuminated illustrations. ⓘ [Troia +39 0881970020](tel:+390881970020)



LUCERA

Swabian/Angevin Castle

Very little remains of the three stories of Frederick II's majestic Palatium, an impregnable fortress built in 1233 on the foundations of a Romanesque cathedral, which dominated the Tavoliere area from the Albano hill. A soaring square tower was subdivided into 3 stories with 32 rooms for the court and the imperial apartments. Its walls rested on a four-sided scarped base, on two stories, with stalls for 500 horses and barracks for the soldiers. It was the site of a state mint, of part of the imperial treasury, and – according to legend – of the emperor's harem as well. Now we may admire the 900 meters of perimeter wall and the 22 reinforcement towers built by Charles of Anjou once the palace was demolished and transformed into a fortress for defense. **Torre della Leonessa** and **Torre del Leone** may be visited, and then it's off to the center to admire the fine door and the large rose window of Basilica Sanctuary of San Francesco Antonio Fasani and the fourteenth-century Cathedral of the Assumption with a fifteenth-century crucifix. [Info +39 0881522762](tel:+390881522762), comune.lucera.fg.it



INTERESTING FACTS

In **Torremaggiore**, the **Ducal Castle** is imposing with its 6 towers, and maintains its Medieval charm, although the original Norman castle conserves only the keep and the 4 round crenellated towers. The interior preserves seventeenth-century frescoes from the Neapolitan School, while 10 km away, at the **Castel Fiorentino** archaeological site, legend has it that **Frederick II** died in 1250, exactly as the court astrologer had foretold: "...you shall die near the iron door, in a place whose name is formed by the word 'flower'..." [Info +39 0882391114](tel:+390882391114)



Rocchetta Sant'Antonio

Famed for the enormous bonfires of 16 and 17 January honouring St. Anthony the Great, it has two symbolic places: the 16th-century Castello D'Aquino with its ogival tower, and the mother church with an octagonal campanile, majestic altars, and the Madonna del Cardellino by Giaquinto.

Sant'Agata di Puglia

The Imperial Castle, which in the Byzantine and Norman era was transformed from a military fortress into a ducal residence, dominates the Medieval village. The Mother Church of S. Nicola, Norman in design and renovated in Baroque style in the 16th century, is a triumph of stuccos and false Corinthian columns.

Bovino

Surrounded by woods, it is known for its many stone doors, with the Romanesque Co-Cathedral of S. Maria Assunta and the Ducal Castle, which houses the Diocesan Museum, with a cylindrical Norman tower. On August 29, don't miss the Historic Procession in period dress. 📞 **Bovino +39 0881966475**

Orsara di Puglia

It is a pilgrimage destination and home to the former Abbazia dell'Angelo abbey complex which came into being in the 12th c. around the grotto of S. Michele on a branch of the Via Francigena. There are beautiful mosaics at the church of S. Pellegrino, the S. Angelo Abbey from 1524, the Baronial Palace, and the Annunziata Church.

Roseto Valfortore

As we stroll through the center, amid original doors, columns, and bas-reliefs, we discover the Majestic Mother Church of S. Maria Assunta with the balustrade sculpted in stone, the holy water basin from 1598, and the campanile with a square roof.

Alberona

The presence of the Templars is palpable here, starting from the Mother Church of the Natività di Maria Vergine SS., called the Prioral Church, rising on the remains of a templar church with a pyramid base, which was a military tower, linked via underground passages to the Palace and to Torre del Gran Priore, the tower that is home to the Knights of Malta. All around are woods, streams, springs, and fountains.

Pietramontecorvino

Terravecchia is the heart of this village, with its imposing, Angevin-era Ducal Palace connected to the Mother Church (Romanesque, with Baroque parts and a square bell tower) and the splendid Norman tower, 30 meters in height: upon climbing a spiral staircase, we may enjoy the view.

San Severo

The town boasts a beautiful Cathedral with its 18th-century organ; the Sanctuary of Maria SS del Soccorso, with its high altar in polychrome marble; the Church of S. Nicola with Neapolitan-school paintings and 18th-century stuccos, and the Church of S. Severino.



Itinerary 3 - The Emperor's Legacy



IMPERIAL PUGLIA

In its layout,
Castel del Monte
has a geometric regularity
more reminiscent
of snowflakes
than of man's work ...

Cesare Brandi
Pellegrino di Puglia



LENGTH OF ITINERARY

Km 125



DURATION

3 - 4 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR

those who feel the charm of history,
love castles and cities of art,
and yield to the pleasures of fine food

THE EMPEROR'S LEGACY

Barletta marks the start of a moving itinerary in the footsteps of Frederick II, the great emperor, a skilled warrior, and a man of enormous culture. He made his residence here, and in 1228 summoned the famous Diet to deliver good governance. An absolute must is a visit to the Co-Cathedral of S. Maria Maggiore and to the Castle, which contains the world's only bust of Frederick. Then it's time for some tasty refreshment in the town center, followed by a visit to **Canosa di Puglia** to see the Hypogea, the Cathedral of S. Sabino, and the tomb of Boemondo and to **Minervino Murge** to travel the road that for centuries has brought pilgrims from the Church of Madonna della Croce to the grotto of S. Michele Arcangelo, an enormous karstic cavity used as a place of worship for more than a millennium. We continue to the lands where Frederick II would hunt, to admire the enigmatic **Castel del Monte** (see photo), a **UNESCO** site since 1996, whose octagonal architecture is still cause for wonder. All around is an agricultural landscape rich with olive trees, age-old paths, sheep shelters called jazzzi, and olive presses. Following the traces of the Medieval past and the scent of Jordan almonds and burratine, in **Andria** it is pleasant to lose oneself in a knot of alleyways and small piazzas, amid towers and churches, like the Cathedral of S. Maria Assunta, which houses the remains of two wives of the Emperor. In **Trani**, the queen of Apulian cathedrals, dedicated to Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim, appears to emerge from the sea. Also of great beauty are the castle and the ancient Jewish quarter, with the Scolanova Synagogue reopened for worship, and the former synagogue, the St. Anna Museum. In nearby **Bisceglie**, known for its fishing tradition, home to the fish market behind the Norman Tower, we visit the Cathedral with a Romanesque core and a Baroque exterior. The tour ends in **Ruvo di Puglia**, whose Cathedral of S. Maria, with its inclined sloping façade, was, according to tradition, partially financed by Frederick II, identified by some with the figure seated above the rose window.



BARLETTA

Co - Cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore

Born atop an Early Christian basilica, it has a Romanesque façade, a Renaissance door, and a Gothic rose window. When descending five meters further down, we find the mosaic floor and the catacombs of the earlier sixth/century and tenth/eleventh-century churches.

📍 **Barletta** +39 0883 331331



BARLETTA

Swabian Castle

Behind the Cathedral, it appears imposing with its moats and spear-point bastions. The residence of **Frederick II**, it was transformed by the Holy Roman Emperor **Charles V** into an impregnable fortress – one of the largest in Italy. Here, the Swabian emperor, before leaving on the Sixth Crusade, promulgated the famous diet on the rules and precepts of good governance, to be observed in his absence. We may visit the large Piazza d'Armi, the underground environments, and the **Museo Civico** which houses the only stone bust attributed to Frederick II. **Info** +39 0883578621, barlettamusei.it

INTERESTING FACTS

In 1986, the castle was chosen by **Franco Zeffirelli** to set his **Otello**, an opera film with **Plácido Domingo** and **Katia Ricciarelli**, while in September every year it is one of the sites for the historical recreation inspired by the famous **Challenge of Barletta** of 1503, in which 13 Italian knights led by Ettore Fieramosca triumphed over the French. 📍 **Barletta** +39 0883331331

TRANI

Cathedral of San Nicola Pellegrino

Imposing in form, it appears suspended between sea and sky. Evocative with its slim lines, it is a set of 3 superimposed churches. The walls are animated by high reliefs and decorations in Arab-inspired style. The interior houses the large **bronze door** from 1175 by Barisano da Trani, with 32 tiles. The large space is divided into three naves by double columns – unique in Puglia. The transversal crypt of **Saint Nicholas the Pilgrim** is a flight of 28 columns supporting the transept of the upper church. From here, we gain access to the longitudinal crypt of **Santa Maria**, with three naves, and to the **San Leucio** hypogeum.

📍 **Trani** +39 3755575405; **Info** +39 0883500293, cattedraletrani.it



RUVO DI PUGLIA

Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta

The gabled façade, with the rose windows and inclined sloped roofs, is iconic. The door is enriched with columns upon which two lions, topped by griffons, rest. The apse's ciborium echoes the one at San Nicola in Bari. 📍 **Ruvo di Puglia** +39 0803628428; **Info** +39 0803611169, cattedraleruvo.it

ANDRIA

Castel del Monte

Here, the wonder of Frederick's castles attains its maximum perfection. Visible from a distance and placed on a high, sunlit hill, it expresses the emperor's magnificence, and with eight strong, slender towers at the corners of the octagonal structure, it brings the Swabians' crown to mind. A **UNESCO** Heritage Site since 1996, it is a place of magic and mystery: it certainly was no fortress, as it lacks defensive elements; perhaps it was conceived as a hunting lodge or show residence, given the richness of the decorations that were later lost. Everything revolves around the number eight, which recurs from the layout to the internal courtyard, from the towers to the eight halls on the first story and on the piano nobile; leaves and flowers over the doors and capitals are also carved in groups of eight. Nothing is left to chance; every element is based on precise calculations. Frederick II once again astounds, leaving us his enigma. In the Kabbalah, the number eight means resurrection, and symbolizes new life. And the octagon, a synthesis of square and circle, is the link joining Heaven and Earth.

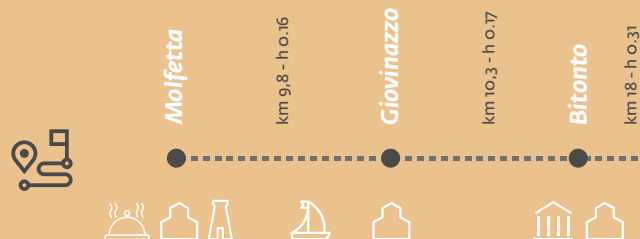
📍 **Andria** +39 0883 290231/0883 290229

Info +39 0883569997, casteldelmonte.beniculturali.it

INTERESTING FACTS

Although **Frederick II** had Swabian and Norman blood, he felt at home in Puglia. His head wore many crowns: King of Sicily and later of Germany, Christian King of Jerusalem and of the Romans, and crowned **Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire** first in Aachen by the electors in 1215, and later by the Pope in Rome, in 1220. A highly skilled warrior and a tireless traveler, he boasted extraordinary culture, with a passion for art and science, astronomy and theology, with knowledge of Greek, Latin, Italian, German, French, Hebrew, and Arabic. Dante was wrong to place him in Hell as a heretic; instead, as medievalist Franco Cardini maintains, despite tensions with the Pope, he never lost his sense of duty as a Christian King, and in fact fought against heresy.

Itinerary 4 - The triumph of Romanesque



BARI AND THE COAST

"The immense, slightly undulating plain of the countryside, the sea so majestic, the sky so infinite and serene constitute a grand, unique trinity."

Paul Schubring
La Puglia: impressioni di viaggio



LENGTH OF ITINERARY

Km 139



DURATION

4 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR

those who feel a little like sailors and a little like fishermen, who love art, and who have a real passion for raw seafood

Itinerary 4

THE TRIUMPH OF ROMANESQUE

A continuously evolving journey to discover seafaring villages, home to age-old stories and art, with castles and cathedrals in a dialogue with the Adriatic. One example is **Molfetta**, (see photo), a hub for pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem and the home of master shipbuilders, where the Cathedral of San Corrado reigns over the sea on one side, and, on the other side, the Basilica of the Madonna dei Martiri, who is celebrated on September 8 with an evocative procession of boats. Further south, the ancient village of **Giovinazzo** appears, and can be admired from on board colorful wooden skiffs. Continuing on to **Bitonto**, the Cathedral of San Valentino and Galleria Nazionale della Puglia at Palazzo Sylos are worth a visit. Then we come to effervescent, modern **Bari**, with Teatro Margherita and the Spazio Murat that now house contemporary art exhibitions, while Museo Archeologico di Santa Scolastica provides a glimpse of the ancient world. In the old city, we are accompanied by the scents of sgagliozze (fried polenta) and Bari's famous focaccia, stopping at the Basilica of San Nicola, the Norman-Swabian Castle, and the Romanesque cathedral of San Sabino with its unexpected underground path. After Torre San Vito, **Polignano a Mare** appears, the capital of cliff diving, the home town of singer Domenico Modugno, and home to Fondazione Museo Pino Pascali, the contemporary art museum dedicated to the Apulian artist. The tour continues with a scenic stroll in **Monopoli**, from Charles V's Castle to the Cathedral of Santa Maria della Madaia, a triumph of Baroque altars and marble. The journey continues to **Conversano**, between its Cathedral, a jewel of Apulian Romanesque architecture, and its imposing Castle, the ancient dwelling of the Counts of Aragon from the house of Acquaviva, and ends at **Gioia del Colle** for a visit to the Norman-Swabian castle, home to **Museo Archeologico Nazionale**.



BARI

Cathedral of San Sabino

Built upon the ruins of a Byzantine church, it is among the greatest examples of Apulian Romanesque. The façade is softened by a series of single-mullioned windows, a double-mullioned window, and a rose window adorned with grotesque figures and fantastic beings. The side is elegant, raised upward by a gallery of arches, by the **large Trulla**, a modern-day sacristy, and the majestic campanile. In the austere and solemn interior, dominating over the high altar is the splendid ambon with the false thirteenth-century matroneum by Alfano da Termoli. The Baroque crypt houses relics of **San Sabino** and the panel of the **Madonna Hodegetria**, painted according to tradition by Saint Luke. On **June 21** every year, the magic is repeated of the light that filters through the rose window, projecting its shadow inside. Minute by minute, amid organ playing and singing, at about 5:10 PM it rests perfectly in the central nave, with the corresponding rose window on the floor.

📍 **Bari** +39 0805242244

INTERESTING FACTS



In the **Crypt**, a museum itinerary offers beautiful Roman and Early Christian mosaics, like that depicting Timothy, tombs from various eras, remains of a Roman road, ceramic finds, the walls of the older Cathedral, and the small early Medieval church.

Info +39 0805210605



BARI

Basilica of San Nicola

This imposing construction, among the earliest examples of Romanesque, stands out for its sculptural details. The gabled façade set between **Torre delle Milizie** and **Torre del Catapano**, from an era prior to the San Nicola structure, is enriched with a central rose window, 5 double-mullioned windows, 3 windows, and 3 entrance doors. At the top, along the sides, the austerity of the stone is softened by a flight of blind and open arches topping the well-decorated doors, including the **Door of the Lions**. The rich central nave is divided from the side naves by granite columns topped by matronea. Prominent at the top is the gilded wooden ceiling, with canvasses by Carlo Rosa. Also of considerable beauty are the altarpiece by **Vivarini** with the Madonna and Saints, the **Ciborium**, the **Cathedra of Elias** sculpted out of a single block of marble, and the silver altar, resting on a mosaic floor in Islamic Byzantine style. The **Crypt** houses the tomb of Saint Nicholas. **Info** +39 0805737111, basilicasannicola.it

THE SAINT WHO CAME FROM THE SEA

It is told that 62 sailors from Bari smuggled the remains of Saint Nicholas out of Myra and brought them to Bari in 1087. Every year, the Patron Saint has two celebrations: from May 7 to 9, the translation of the remains is recreated, while December 6 is dedicated to the liturgical solemnity of the Saint. On the evening of May 7, the city is illuminated with lights, music, aerial dances, and acrobatics with more than 500 re-creators parading in period clothing. On May 9, the ritual of the manna taken from the Saint's tomb is repeated.

BARI

Norman/Swabian Castle

The manor, protected by a wall and surrounded by a large moat, has had a troubled life. Built by **Frederick II's** grandfather Roger II, trapezoidal in layout with a central courtyard and 4 high corner towers, it was partially destroyed in 1156 by the harsh intervention of William the Bad. It was rebuilt by puer Apuliae between 1233 and 1240, with a new exterior making it more of a residence than an austere castle. Windows were opened in the towers, but the change is most evident in the high groin vaults supported by columns with different capitals; the one with a series of warriors' heads – a warning for any invaders – is original. The sixteenth century was the castle's golden age when, with Isabella of Aragon and her daughter Bona Sforza, it became a lively and cultured court. The Renaissance courtyard is enlivened by a monumental double staircase. ⓘ **Bari +39 0805242244 Info +39 080 5213704**

INTERESTING FACTS



A few kilometers from Bari, at the **Gioia del Colle** Castle, lived Bianca Lancia, **Frederick II's** lover and Manfred's mother, who gave birth in the Tower where she had been segregated because of the emperor's jealousy. Two rotund elements are carved in the stone; it is told they are the breasts that Bianca cut off and sent on a tray, along with the newborn Manfred. Today, the castle is home to **Museo Archeologico Nazionale**. **Info +39 0803491780**



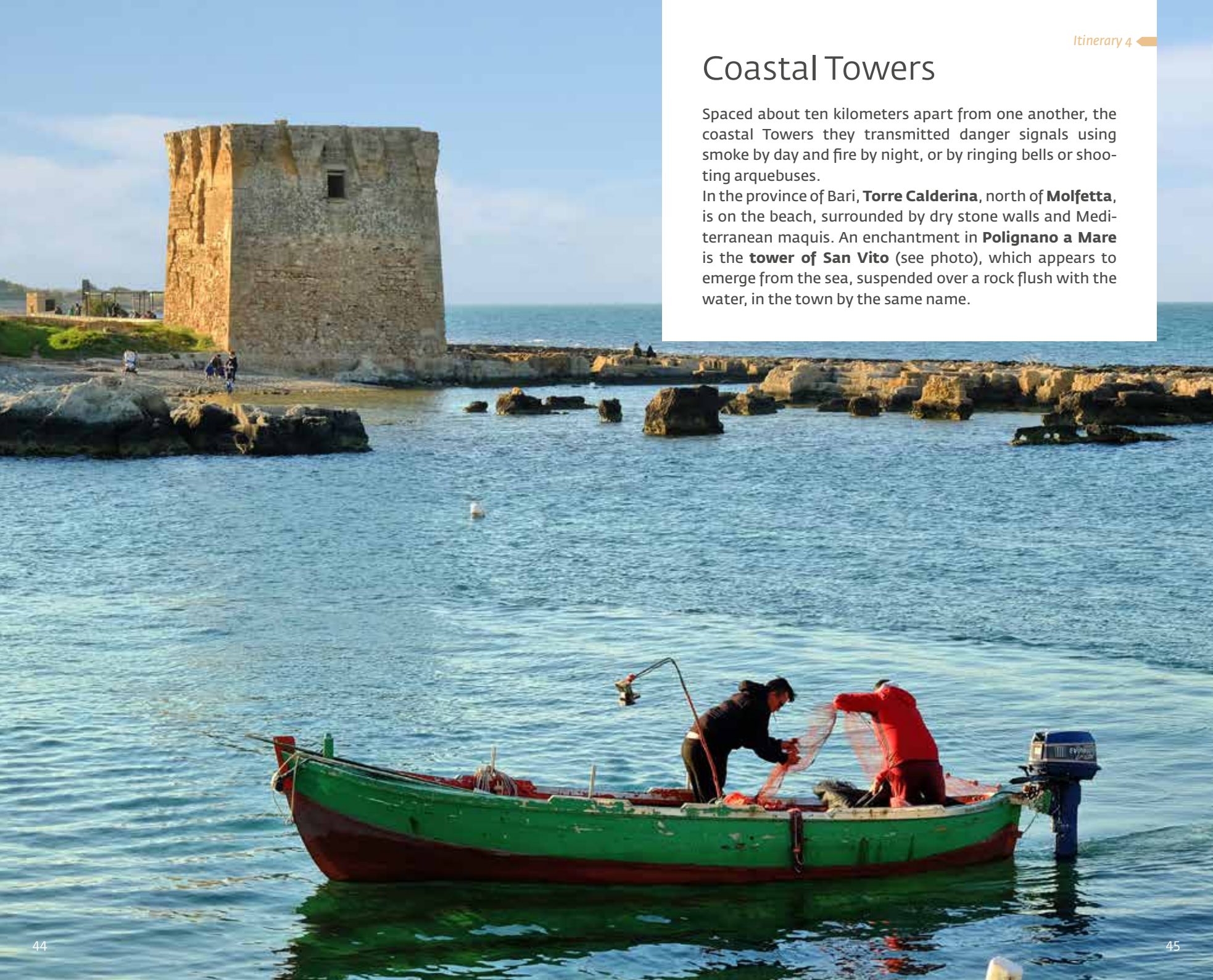
The Castle's **Gipsoteca** is worth a visit, to admire the region's artistic masterworks – 130 plaster casts of capitals, statues, corbels, and doors – done for the 1911 Ethnographic Exhibition in Rome. We can then descend into **Underground Bari**, accompanied by archaeologists, to see the remains of a Byzantine settlement also at the Castle, the stratification of eras in the Crypt of the Cathedral of **San Sabino**, and the remains of two Byzantine-era and Romanesque churches at **Palazzo Simi**.

ⓘ **Bari +39 0805242244**

Coastal Towers

Spaced about ten kilometers apart from one another, the coastal Towers they transmitted danger signals using smoke by day and fire by night, or by ringing bells or shooting arquebuses.

In the province of Bari, **Torre Calderina**, north of **Molfetta**, is on the beach, surrounded by dry stone walls and Mediterranean maquis. An enchantment in **Polignano a Mare** is the **tower of San Vito** (see photo), which appears to emerge from the sea, suspended over a rock flush with the water, in the town by the same name.





Bari - Santa Candida

An ancient church in Lama Picone, its fan-shaped interior boasts 5 naves around the central hall, separated by columns with round arches ending with 5 apses, where the names of Saints Erasmus Iacobus, Candida, and Thomas may be seen, painted in red.

📍 **Bari** +39 0805242244

Molfetta

Cathedral of San Corrado

The Cathedral overlooks the sea, with 3 pyramid domes, sloped roofs lined with limestone slabs, and 2 twin towers, closing the apse at the sides. There is a fine 12th-century high relief of the Redeemer, and the holy water basin dates to the 13th c.

📍 **Molfetta** +39 351 986 9433

Bitonto

Cathedral of San Valentino

The large door bears Eastern decorations, and the rose window boasts a soprarco with a sphinx and two lions at the sides on hanging columns. The interior preserves the rare monolithic basin of the baptismal font and the 1229 ambon by Nicolaus. From the crypt, we descend to the Early Christian church and its 11th-century mosaic.

cattedralebitonto.com

Conversano - Aragonese Castle

Of the ancient Norman fortress, only the mighty Main Tower remains, incorporated into the princely dwelling of the Acquaviva family, to which it owes its Cylindrical Tower. It is home to Gipsoteca Comunale and to Pinacoteca Francesco Netti. **Info** +39 080 4958525

MONOPOLI - CATHEDRAL OF SANTA MARIA DELLA MADIA



Strolling through the alleyways in the town center, we reach a piazza enclosed by a rusticated wall that seems to protect the imposing Cathedral and its soaring campanile. The exterior decoration is elegant, while the large central window that replaced the rose window during the Baroque period is quite striking. The interior is pure spectacle, artfully created to enhance and pay homage to the **Madonna della Mada**, a succession of colored marble and Baroque altars. The side naves end in front of two staircases leading to the twelfth-century holy icon. The arrival from the sea of the Byzantine icon of the **Madonna with Child** is recreated in August every year. On the evening of August 13, a copy of the icon is carried in procession to Piazza Plebiscito, and the following day another copy is placed on a raft that in the evening reaches Cala Batteria with divers escorting it by torchlight. cattedralemonopoli.net

Itinerary 5 - Churches hidden in the rocks



MAGNA GRECIA, MURGIA AND THE GRAVINE

Taranto: two seas and two souls (...) made of light and shadow, whose maximum splendor belongs to now remote times, when it was the most important trading port for the East...

Stefania Mola
Il Giro della Puglia in 501 luoghi



LENGTH OF ITINERARY
Km 155



DURATION
5-7 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR
lovers of nature and active vacations, wanna-be spelologists, and those who harbor a true veneration for bread





Itinerary 5

CHURCHES HIDDEN IN THE ROCKS

Some of Europe's largest canyons, and rock churches to be discovered in the belly of the earth, are featured in the itinerary that starts from **Gravina in Puglia** with its imposing San Michele delle Grotte, the Seven Chambers Complex, the Crypt of Saint Vitus the Elder reconstructed in Museo Pomarici Santomasi, and original churches, like the Romanesque Santa Maria Assunta and the Baroque Madonna delle Grazie. The tour continues in the footsteps of dinosaurs and Neanderthals in nearby **Altamura**, an Authentic Village of Italy known for its DPO bread, and the beautiful Cathedral of the Assumption, one of the 4 Palatine Churches built by Frederick II. From here, the tour heads to **Latterza**, with majolicaware to be admired at MuMa - Museo della Maiolica, excellent bread, and the imposing gorge called Gravina Oasi Lipu, in Parco Terra delle Gravine. By hang glider, in **Ginosa**, we fly over the rupestrian church of Santa Sofia, cave homes, and the Santi Medici church, home to an Ecce Homo painting. In **Castellaneta**, a short hike leads to the Church of Santo Stefano I, to Santa Maria di Costantinopoli, and to the crypt of the Eternal Father; **Mottola**, on the other hand, is home to the Mirabili Grotte di Dio grottoes and stupendous frescoes of rupestrian churches, like Santa Margherita, Sant'Angelo, and San Nicola di Myra. Gravina di San Marco in **Massafra** is studded with hundreds of caves, from the home of Hegumen to the Santa Marina, Candelora (see photo) and San Leonardo churches. Moving to the Ionian side, we dive into the glory of Magna Graecia. We discover **Taranto** from the bottom up, amid the pittaggi, the ancient quarters of Isola Madre; the underground olive presses; the Necropolis with unbelievable tombs such as that of the Athletes and the Ori di Taranto at MARtA, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Our tour then visits the Cathedral of San Cataldo and the Aragonese Castle, and the evocative rites of Holy Week. In **Grottaglie**, we visit the Ceramics Quarter and the Museum and former stables of Castello Episcopio, to discover ceramic production from the 14th to the 20th centuries.



TARANTO

Cathedral of San Cataldo

It has to be looked for, hidden in the heart of Isola Madre and its three thousand years of history, at the end of Via Duomo when coming from the castle. Puglia's oldest Cathedral, it dates to the second half of the tenth century. Having undergone modifications over the centuries, it is a blend of styles. The Baroque façade is enriched with medallions, angels, and saints. The majestic interior is marked by the rich wood and gold coffering dominating over the vault of the central nave, a testament to the city's masters of woodworking and goldsmithery. A genuine jewel of Baroque art is the **Cappellone di San Cataldo**, to the right of the presbytery. It is impossible not to be awed by the rich marble decorations, by the presence of statues, and by the high altar that preserves the relics of Saint Catald. Above, we see the immense Baroque fresco dedicated to the life of Saint Catald. The crypt houses columns and frescoes in Byzantine style. ⓘ [Taranto +39 3342844098 cattedraletaranto.com](https://www.taranto+393342844098cattedraletaranto.com)

INTERESTING FACTS

THE ADDOLORATA E DEI MISTERI PROCESSION IN TARANTO

This is perhaps the most evocative of the rituals in Puglia's Holy Week, and certainly the most mystical and agonizing. The poste – pairs of Brothers from the Maria Santissima Addolorata e San Domenico Confraternity – take 14 hours to reach the new city during the **Addolorata** (Our Lady of Sorrows) **Procession**. They move to the rhythm of the troccola (a wooden instrument), each wearing a white hood over his face with two holes for his eyes, a mozzetta and black shoes, and white gloves. From the Church of San Domenico Maggiore in the old village, at midnight between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, they set forth carrying the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows on their shoulders. At 5:00 PM on Good Friday, the **Procession of the Mysteries** leaves from the Madonna del Carmine Church, ending 15 hours later. The statues, which re-evolve the Passion of Jesus, are carried by Perdùne, brothers in the Maria Santissima del Carmine Confraternity, rigorously barefoot and wearing white shirts, black belts, rosaries, scapulars, cream-colored mozzette, and hoods over their faces. The procession ends at 8:00 AM on Holy Saturday, when the troccola player raps three times on the church door with the top of his age-old pilgrim's staff.



TARANTO Aragonese Castle

Its monuments wrapped in plays of light astound, as does the Castle whose mighty heart reserves a wealth of surprises. Rebuilt by **Ferdinand of Aragon**, it was impregnable and could accommodate up to four thousand soldiers. A symbol of the city and included among the top-ten “luoghi del cuore” sites by FAI - Fondo Ambiente Italiano, The National Trust for Italy, it is one of the region's most visited monuments. In 90 minutes, we can discover the Renaissance Chapel of **San Leonardo**, the walkways, the 4 cylindrical towers, and the galleries.

📍 **Taranto** +39 3342844098; Info +39 0997753438, castelloaragonesetaranto.it

INTERESTING FACTS

The writer **Alexandre Dumas** drew inspiration from the Aragonese Castle when he wrote The Count of Montecristo. His father Thomas Alexandre Dumas, a Napoleonic general, was imprisoned in this very manor.

GROTTAGLIE Bishops' Castle

A symbol of the feudal power of Taranto's bishops, it is just a stone's throw from the Ceramics Quarter. Dating to the fifteenth century are its main tower, its wall, the two curtain towers, and the rooms on the piano nobile. Today it appears with the ancient interior tower divided into 4 stories, the former seat of the Episcopate, and **Museo della Ceramica** in the south-east wing. 📍 **Grottaglie** +39 0995623866





Gravina in Puglia

S. Michele delle Grotte

Excavated into the rock around 1000 AD, it has 5 naves, 14 columns, and 3 altars. Of the frescoes, a Christ Pantocrator and St. Michael of the Caves remain on the central apse, while statues of St. Michael and of the Archangels Gabriel and Raphael may be seen on the altars.

Info +39 0803269065

Laterza

The Maria SS. Mater Domini Sanctuary, with its frescoed Byzantine crypt, is worth a visit, as is the 16th-century rupestrian church of S. Vito, divided into a semi-underground part and a part excavated into the tuff stone, with the fresco on the altar of St. Vitus the Martyr, with the holy doctors at the sides.

Info +39 099 8296793

Ginosa

Of the 15 rupestrian churches, few, like S. Sofia, can be explored: excavated in the 17th c., it conserves frescoes on the presbytery. Of importance are the many 16th-century cave homes and the Santi Medici church, conserving a painting of an Ecce Homo.

Info +39 0998290332

Castellaneta

On Monte Camplo, we can visit the S. Stefano I church with 13th/14th-century frescoes and, in Gravina Coriglione, the 12th/13th-c. S. Maria di Costantinopoli and the underground Padre Eterno crypt, with paintings of saints and Christ between the Virgin and St. John.

Info +39 099 8497278

Mottola

Mirabili Grotte di Dio is a complex of rupestrian churches from the 11th to the 14th centuries: from S. Margherita to S. Angelo, the only one in Italy on two levels; from S. Nicola di Myra, the Sistine Chappel of rupestrian civilization, to the S. Gregorio church with its large Christ Pantocrator.

Info +39 099 8867640,

mottolaturismo.it

Massafra

The S. Marco gravina includes the home of the Hegumen, the rupestrian village, and the Church of S. Marina. Highly beautiful are the 13 12th-century frescos in the Candelora church, with a unique, Komnenos-school Christological scene of the Presentation of the temple. The 14th-century St. Leonard with Christ Pantocrator in deesis is astounding.

Info +39 0998804695



ALTAMURA - CATHEDRAL OF THE ASSUMPTION



This is one of the four Palatine Churches built by **Frederick II**. Partially destroyed by an earthquake in 1316, it was rebuilt in Gothic style. The majestic pointed-arch façade is set between two soaring campanili, with a fourteenth-century 15-spoke rose window and a magnificent decorated door. The interior presents a set of styles and renovations from the mid nineteenth century, such as the columns lined with marble and stuccos.

Itinerary 6 - *Microcosm of art*



ITRIA VALLEY

"The countless brown cones
marked by the emblem
of the Phoenicians.
Long, rosy clouds in an aquamarine sky ...
White cities growing blue in the evening."

Gabriele D'Annunzio
Cronache di un viaggio 1917



LENGTH OF ITINERARY
Km 116



DURATION
4 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR
romantic souls who dream
of an escape to the trulli, bon vivants,
and unrepentant food lovers



Itinerary 6

MICROCOSM OF ART

Amid fabulous landscapes and authentic flavours, the tour starts from the coast, where treasures of inestimable beauty are waiting to be discovered, and continues into the green heart of the Itria Valley. In **Savelletri di Fasano**, the rupestrian Lama d'Antico park offers a surprise amid age-old olive trees, and a short distance away is ancient **Egnazia**, with its Acropolis overlooking the Adriatic and Museo Nazionale Archeologico, home to precious finds. Don't miss a dive in the coves between **Torre Canne** and **Torre S. Leonardo** in Parco delle Dune Costiere, and a tasty frisella dressed with Regina tomato from Torre Canne, a Slow Food bastion, and DPO Collina oil from Brindisi. The Ottava Grande farmhouse is worth a visit, with its Medieval, eleventh century church of S. Pietro in Ottava, and the imposing square tower that, with **Torre Guaceto**, completes the coastal defense system. The hinterland awaits discovery, with **Ostuni**, the entryway to the Itria Valley and terrace overlooking the plain of millennium-old olive trees. August 26 every year witnesses Cavalcata di S. Oronzo – "St. Orontius's ride," the beautiful procession honoring Saint Orontius with horses and horsemen. Don't miss the Cathedral and Museo delle Civiltà Preclassiche della Murgia Meridionale, home to the cast of Delia, a pregnant woman 28 thousand years old. From here, to reach **Alberobello** (see photo), a **UNESCO** heritage site since 1996, with its 1500 trulli, we pass by way of **Cisternino**, famed for its open kitchens serving excellent meat, and the ring-shaped **Locorotondo**, both among Italy's most beautiful villages, with pointed roofs and a magnificent view overlooking the vineyards of Locorotondo DOC. Elegant **Martina Franca** is rich with palazzi and Baroque churches like Basilica di S. Martino, and home to the famed Capocollo and bombette, small roulades, also served in a version to enjoy while walking.

SAVELLETRI DI FASANO

Parco Rupestre

This leaves one truly astounded for its majesty, and the richness of detail. The **Rupestrian Church of Lama d'Antico** is among the region's largest, immersed amid olive trees and, three kilometers from Fasano, extends almost to the sea. It is surrounded by a very ancient village carved into the caves, developing over the course of six or seven centuries: it is a whole succession of houses and workshops, animal shelters, places for agricultural activities, tombs and funerary monuments. Lama d'Antico is a Cathedral dug into the rock, with two naves and 23 blind arches that run along the perimeter walls, displaying a series of Eastern and Latin paintings. The architectural treasures of the **Church of San Giovanni** with its influences from the Middle East, Palestine, and Syria are worth a look, as are the beautiful frescoes in the **Church of San Lorenzo**, such as the hieratic and expressive figures of Saints Basil and Benedict.

📍 **Fasano** +39 0804394182; **Info** +39 3283597517, lamadantico.it



CAROVIGNO

Torre Guaceto

Inside a Marine Protected Area and Natural Reserve, **Torre Guaceto**, 16 meters per side, is one of the largest coastal towers. An ancient stronghold defending the coast, it has stood guard for centuries, faced thousands of storms, and withstood attacks and the wear of time. The tower has been renovated, with a new interior arrangement housing the artistic installation of a Roman ship, reproduced on a 1:1 scale, by master woodworker Mario Palmieri. Crystal-clear waters invite a dive, and the surrounding landscape of dunes, bays, and the remains of a Neolithic village are all to be discovered, following the guided itineraries proposed by the park. **Info** +39 08311989976 riservaditorreguaceto.it



MARTINA FRANCA

Basilica of S. Martino

At the top of the staircase, the Majestic, 37-meter façade appears; at its center is the large high relief of Saint Martin in the saddle of a galloping horse, recreating the scene of the Saint and the pauper. Unbelievably imposing is its single-nave interior, enriched by an array of marble altars, the most prestigious of which is the **Santissimo Sacramento Chapel**, with paintings of the Evangelists by Domenico Carella, and the large Altarpiece of the Holy Spirit. The inlaid pulpit by Domenico Semeraro, a cabinetmaker from the time, is a precious work. Rising at the center of the presbytery is a monumental high altar in polychrome marble.

MuBa is the Basilica's new museum in Palazzo Stabile. It houses reliquaries, a collection of liturgical texts, the Basilica's treasure with wondrous silver pieces, sacred paraments, and prized choral works, such as the Gregorian Chant in sheepskin.

muba-sanmartino.it

OSTUNI

Co - Cathedral of Santa Maria dell'Assunzione

We arrive by slowly ascending the main avenue, making our way among the people crowding it from spring to autumn. Alternatively, we pass by way of evocative stairways and narrow alleyways. The fifteenth-century Cathedral has late Gothic lines and 3 rose windows in the façade: the 24-spoked one at the center is astounding. The interiors underwent modifications in various eras, and are in Baroque style. 📞 **Ostuni** +39 0831 339627

CAN'T - MISS EVENTS

26
AUG

Cavalcata di Sant'Oronzo marks the festivities celebrating the patron saint. A cortège of Murgia horses with red banners and mother-of-pearl decorations, accompanied by festively harnessed horsemen, parades through the town's streets, escorting the city's Protector. According to tradition, the origins of the procession may be dated to the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Plague invaded Salento, sparing Ostuni and other cities in the Terra d'Otranto area. The miracle was attributed to Saint Orontius.

INTERESTING FACTS

When visiting Martina Franca, it is worth making a stop at the many butcher shops there, to enjoy **Capocollo di Martina**: tasty and spicy, it is the most famous charcuterie of the Murgia dei Trulli and the Itria Valley.



Itinerary 7 - Baroque Embroidery



SALENTO

"Salento
is a land of mirages,
a windy, fantastic land,
full of sweetness..."

Vittorio Bodini
Tutte le poesie



LENGTH OF ITINERARY

Km 216



DURATION

4 - 5 Days



RECOMMENDED FOR

those who feel the Baroque inside, who love
cities of art and strolling - all while looking
up so as not to miss a single detail

Copertino

km 12 - h o. 17

Nardò

km 8.6 - h o. 13

Galatone

km 10.4 - h o. 15

Galatina

km 7.7 - h o. 9

Corigliano d'Otranto

km 7.9 - h o. 11

Maglie

km 21.3 - h o. 21

Ruffano



Itinerary 7

BAROQUE EMBROIDERY

The charm of **Brindisi**, an important port during the Roman age and a starting point for the Crusades, is revealed along Scalinata Virgilio, the stairway topped by the Roman Column, where the view ranges all the way to the Alfonso Castle on the island of Sant'Andrea. After visiting Museo Archeologico Provinciale and the excavations of San Pietro degli Schiavoni, we stop by the temple of San Giovanni in Sepolcro before admiring the Cathedral of San Giovanni Battista and, outside the city, the original Church of Santa Maria del Casale. In the hinterland, the villages dazzle with the splendor of palaces, castles, and churches, like Santa Maria di Betlem in **Mesagne** or the Minor Basilica of San Rosario in **Francavilla Fontana**, known for its dramatic Passio Christi. We then visit **Oria**, and then it's on to **Manduria** to discover Italy's largest Messapian archaeological area and to raise a toast with the famed Primitivo wine. A surprising sight is the Abbey of Santa Maria di Cerrate at the gates of **Lecce**, a city of Baroque triumph. The monumental Basilica di Santa Croce is joined by the dramatic Piazza Duomo, and by the San Matteo, Rosario (see photo), Sant'Irene, and Santa Chiara churches. Then there is Piazza Sant'Oronzo with its Amphitheater just a stone's throw from the Castle of Charles V. No less imposing is the castle of **Copertino**, the city of Saint Joseph, with the places of the saint, and the Basilica of Santa Maria della Neve. Baroque opulence continues to astound in **Nardò** with the church of San Domenico; it is encountered in the Santissimo Crocifisso Sanctuary in **Galatone** and in the Santi Pietro e Paolo Basilica in **Galatina**, known for its sweet pasticciotto and the marvelous Basilica of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria; and we see it in Castello de' Monti in **Corigliano d'Otranto**, while it explodes in the Procession of the Mysteries on Good Friday in **Maglie** and amid the altars at the Natività della Beata Vergine Maria church in **Ruffano**.

BRINDISI

Santa Maria del Casale

A magnificent example of thirteenth-century Romanesque-Gothic, it boasts an elegant façade in yellow carparo and white stone, with an entrance topped by a striking hanging porch. The single-nave interior preserves extraordinary fourteenth-century frescoes, like the majestic Universal Judgment by Rinaldo da Taranto. ⓘ [Brindisi +39 0831229784](tel:+390831229784)



BRINDISI

Castello Alfonsino

Recent renovations have given new life to the fort, the internal marina, and the garrison stronghold. The complex structure, which Alfonso of Aragon built in 1445 on the island of Sant'Andrea at the harbor's exit, has particular charm when the sun at dusk sets the walls' red carparo ablaze.

ⓘ [Brindisi +39 0831229784](tel:+390831229784)

SQUINZANO - CASALABATE

Abbey of Santa Maria Cerrate

A Greek Orthodox monastic complex, it is among the most important in southern Italy and an active center of farm production, with a bakery, mill, farmhouses, and underground olive presses. Entrusted to Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI), recent restorations have given it new life. The late eleventh-century church with a gabled façade is a fine specimen of Apulian Romanesque. Divided into three naves, it was completely decorated with twelfth/thirteenth-century works, discovered after the "tearing off" of the later frescoes preserved in the adjacent farmer's house called Casa del Massaro. [Info +39 0832361176](tel:+390832361176), abbaziadicerrate.it



LECCE

Santa Croce

A short distance from Piazza Sant'Oronzo is the city's heart, and upon arrival we are left speechless by the splendor and embellishment of the stone. It is the apotheosis of Baroque, along with the former **Convent of the Celestines**. Over the course of a century, from 1549 to 1646, no fewer than **three architects** – Riccardi, Zimbalo, and Penna– plus numerous stonecutters made their contribution to the rich façade. It is an endless succession of **decorations**: men, fantastic animals, harpies and sirens, 13 dancing putti, and animal figures alternating with symbolic elements. The façade is divided into three parts, the three entrances characterize the first, less elaborate one. This is followed by the rich **balcony** held up by 13 telamons. The figures of the infidel Turks defeated in the Battle of Lepanto alternate with the powers united to vanquish them, represented by the dragon, emblem of the family of Pope Gregory XIII, the griffin for Genoa, and Hercules for the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Standing out in the center is the world's largest Baroque rose window. The Greek-cross interior is as sober as the façade is rich. ⓘ [Lecce +39 0832246517/0832242099](tel:+390832246517) basilicasantacrocelecce.it

INTERESTING FACTS



On the architrave we can see two putti holding a compass and square, the universal symbols used by the Masonry. Melchizedek with the Grail, venerated by the Templars, dominates over a column behind the high altar. Inside, at the **summer solstice** on June 21, from 4 to 4:15 PM, we may witness the first of six plays of sunlight that are later repeated, in symbolic points of the central nave, on August 21 and 29, September 12 and 18, and closing with the autumnal equinox on September 20.

LECCE

Cathedral of Maria Santissima Assunta

Lecce enchants with its many Baroque churches built by bishops like Luigi Pappacoda, whose center of power was Piazza Duomo. Spectacular and with a single access full of loggias and statues of saints, it closes the seventeenth-century Palazzo del Seminario with its beautiful well of Sant'Irene and the loggia of the **Bishop's Palace**, which sets the stage for the lateral face of the **Cathedral of Maria Santissima Assunta** and its campanile soaring 5 stories in height. The 3-nave interior divided by 12 pillars is an apotheosis of golden decorations on the vaults of the side naves, while the central one is enriched with a coffered wood ceiling and gold studs, with three canvasses depicting the life of Saint Orontius. The side altars are sumptuous; the high altar is in polychrome marble, and opening behind it is the presbytery enriched with enormous canvasses by Tiso. Beneath is the Crypt of **Santa Maria della Scala**, with 92 columns, all with different capitals.

ⓘ [Lecce +39 0832246517/0832242099](tel:+390832246517) cattedraledilecce.it



LECCE

Castle of Charles V

Lecce is to be enjoyed at a slow pace. Dazed by the unbridled charm of Baroque, we come, step after step, before solid walls of a stone without carvings or decoration, the **Castle of Charles V**. What we see today is the result of how it has changed over time; rebuilt by Gian Giacomo dell'Acaya at the order of Charles V, it contains an unknown world of underground environments, prisons with graffiti-covered walls, and coats of arms, telling life stories. The watch paths are worth a look, as are the chapel of San Francesco with its historic papier-mâché Nativity scene, and the chapel of Santa Barbara. A fun attraction is **Museo della Cartapesta**, which covers the history of Lecce papier-mâché in no fewer than 100 works from the eighteenth century to the present day. Bare but beautiful are the rooms on the piano nobile of Maria d'Enghien, Countess of Lecce, where temporary exhibitions are staged. ① [Lecce +39 0832246517 castelloleccarlov.it](https://www.castelloleccarlov.it)



COPERTINO

Norman/Swabian Castle

In the city of the flying saint, the monumental castle is worth a visit. Modified in 1540, it boasts a Renaissance-era Catalan door in the style of the Durazzos, 4 corner bastions, and a large moat, and the richly and colorfully frescoed San Marco Chapel, which preserves the sarcophagi of the Squarciafico marquesses. [Info +39 0832931612](https://www.squarciafico.it)



GALATINA

Basilica of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria

This is the mausoleum of the Princes Orsini del Balzo, built by **Raimondello** and his wife **Maria d'Enghien**. The Romanesque exterior is enriched by the embroidery of the central door and by the large rose window. An inscription over the side door commemorates its consecration to the Latin rite. The exterior rigor is countered by spectacular frescoes in the 5 naves. Given the enormity of its Giotto-school **painting cycles**, it is unsurprisingly referred to as the **Assisi of Salento**. The central nave tells the stories of the Apocalypse, Genesis, and the New Testament, while the life of Saint Catherine is related in the presbytery.

INTERESTING FACTS

The precious treasures and relics housed in the small **Basilica Museum** include one that is a point of contention between Gallipoli and Galatina: the breast of Saint Agatha. Smuggled out of Constantinople, it reached Gallipoli where it was forgotten. In 1399, when the new basilica was completed, Raimondello Orsini decided to move it here. [basilicaorsiniana.it](https://www.basilicaorsiniana.it)



Lecce

Church of San Matteo

The façade, convex at the bottom and concave at the top, makes a great impact. Elliptical in layout, it houses rich altars, 12 statues depicting the Apostles, paintings by Serafino d'Elmo, and a 15th-century wooden Pietà.

Lecce

Church of Sant'Irene

Sober on the outside and rich on the inside, its façade is marked by two Corinthian columns over the door and the she-wolf topped by the oak, while 3 chapels open onto a single nave, plus a host of Baroque altars with garlands, ivy, human and elephant heads, snakes and birds.

Lecce

Church of the Rosario

Its sumptuous façade is animated by spires and floral tufts, spiral columns, winged horses, angels and saints. It has a Greek-cross interior, which concludes with the unusual octagonal tympanum and a pulpit in Lecce stone, depicting the Apocalypse.

Lecce

Church of Santa Chiara

This church stands out for its octagonal shape and a rare papier-mâché ceiling. Inside, one is enveloped by the pomp and magnificence of the prized altars in Lecce stone, decorated with twisted columns, angels, garlands, sculptures, and Neapolitan-made wooden statues.

Galatina

S. Pietro e Paolo Basilica

The 36-meter front is enlivened with niches containing statues, pilasters, spirals, and large windows. Inside, the church preserves the stone upon which, according to tradition, Saint Peter sat while on his way to Rome. Also beautiful is Sammartino's white marble Immacolata in the large chapel.

Nardò

Church of San Domenico

The carparo façade is rich in its first part with gnomes, cherubs, putti, garlands, and caryatids, and more sober above, with the large window in the middle. It preserves the altar of the Madonna del Rosario with 15 mysteries by Antonio D'Orlando.

📍 **Nardò** +39 0833836928

Ruffano

Church of Natività della Beata Vergine Maria

Inside, we admire prized works such as the octagonal canvas in the transept with the Nativity of Maria, the large paintings in the presbytery, placed above the 29-stall wooden chorus, and six richly decorated Baroque altars.

Corigliano d'Otranto

Castello De' Monti

The castle boasts a fine seventeenth-century façade, with a sumptuous Baroque balcony. It has four towers and a large moat, and on the inside we find the excavations room, the Medieval hall, and the hall of the horsewoman. Concerts and events are held here.

📍 **Corigliano** +39 3334489871



Itinerary 8 - Breathtaking towers and castles



SALENTO

“This history on our cost
began in the times of yore,
when Maria D’Enghien reigned
in the Terra d’Otranto,
and a serpent inhabited the tower”

Maria Corti
L'Orchestra di Tutti

LENGTH OF ITINERARY

Km 241

DURATION

5 - 7 Days

RECOMMENDED FOR



km 13.3 - h 0.18

 $\kappa m 34,1 - h 0.47$ 

12.2 - h o



04-10173



09-03-2017

 $\kappa m 22,3 - h 0.32$ 

km 26.7 - h 0.29



An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The sea is a vibrant turquoise color, revealing a rocky seabed with patches of green algae. A lone diver is visible in the water, swimming towards the bottom. The coastline is composed of high, layered rock formations that drop sharply into the sea. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

Itinerary 8

BREATHTAKING TOWERS AND CASTLES

The itinerary along the spectacular Salento coast starts from **Acaya**, a fortified village near Lecce. It passes by way of **Roca Vecchia**, with the remains of a Messapian necropolis, and visits **Torre dell'Orso** and the faraglioni in **Torre Sant'Andrea** (see photo) for a dive into the bay before detouring to **Carpignano Salentino** to discover the Crypt of Santa Cristina, and, in **Giurdignano**, realm of dolmens and menhirs, that of San Salvatore. Just a few minutes later we are in **Otranto**, Italy's easternmost city, boasting an Aragonese castle and the Cathedral of Santa Maria Annunziata with its precious twelfth-century mosaic. This is followed by a succession of breathtaking landscapes, studded by the legendary Torre del Serpe and, further south, Torre Sant'Emiliano. A fine archaeological tour starts from **Vaste** with the Santi Stefani Crypt, passes by way of Santa Maria degli Angeli in **Poggiardo**, traverses **Castro**, the village towering over the sea with the archaeological museum in the Aragonese castle, and, after stopping in picturesque **Tricase Porto**, reaches the Madonna del Gonfalone Crypt in **Tricase**. From here, after discovering, in **Alessano**, the places of Don Tonino Bello (the case for his beatification is in progress), we come to the ancient Basilica of Santa Maria De Finibus Terrae in **Santa Maria di Leuca**. On the Ionian side, endless beaches are encountered, as well as **Torre Vado**, **Torre Pali**, **Torre Mozza**, and **Torre San Giovanni**. The path along the coastline is interrupted to visit the Crypt of the Crucifix in **Ugento** and the church of Santa Maria della Croce in **Casarano**, two authentic masterpieces. Off in the distance is **Gallipoli**, with the Angevin Castle's high walls appearing to protect the Cathedral of Santa Agata and the many churches of the Confraternities, while from **Santa Maria al Bagno** to the coast of **Manduria**, passing by way of **Porto Cesareo**, the towers become increasingly imposing, and the bays increasingly breathtaking. A sunset swim brings evocative charm.

VERNOLE

Acaya Castle

This small village fortified in the sixteenth century, just a few kilometers from Lecce and the work of Gian Giacomo dell'Acaya, boasts sturdy bastions on three corners and a trapezoidally-shaped castle built in the south-west quarter, now home to exhibitions and events. In the courtyard, we may admire the fourteenth-century Dormitio Virginis fresco, and on the inside the nine-sided Sala Ennagonale.

Info +39 3472535235



OTRANTO

Aragonese Castle

Strolling through the alleyways, we still feel the presence of the Turkish siege of 1480 to which the castle's history is linked, and the 1481 reconstruction under Duke Alfonso of Aragon. The Diamond Head bastion and the triangular hall are beautiful. Inside are permanent exhibitions on local history and on the Deer Cave (Grotta dei Cervi), plus major international shows. ⓘ [Otranto +39 0836801436](tel:+390836801436); [Info +39 0836210094](tel:+390836210094); castellodiotranto.it

CASTRO

Castello Aragonese

Strolling amid the age-old walls with a view of the sea, we reach the twelfth-century **Castle**, rectangular in layout, with 4 corner bastions; it is home to **Museo Archeologico** with its precious finds, such as the bust of a large statue of Athena, more than 3 meters tall, plus the Palladium of Troy and a bronze of Minerva, thus confirming Castro's link to Aeneas, as Virgil related. ⓘ [Castro +39 0836943340](tel:+390836943340) [Info +39 0836947005](tel:+390836947005)



GALLIPOLI

Angevin Castle

Known as the "beautiful city" and as the city of olive oil, Gallipoli is as sunny and vibrant as its Castle, whose restored spaces have been given new life, and have for several years hosted cultural events and major shows. It is square in shape with corner towers, one of which surrounded by the sea – the Rivellino, once an open-air movie theater in the summertime. Built in the eleventh century, it was modified in the late fifteenth century by the military architect Martini, at the order of Alfonso II of Naples. ⓘ [Gallipoli +39 0833262529](tel:+390833262529); [Info +39 0833 262775](tel:+390833262775)

OTRANTO

Cathedral of Santa Maria Annunziata

The easternmost of the Apulian Romanesque cathedrals boasts a splendid, fifteenth-century, 16-spoke rose window. The Latin Cross interior, with three naves, a semicircular apse, two side chapels, and 14 granite columns also conserves a precious **mosaic floor** from 1163, by the **monk Pantaleone**. Europe's largest, it depicts the complex Tree of Life with scenes blending the sacred and the profane, spreading throughout the central nave in a succession of biblical, mythological, and historical representations and figures, with Adam and Eve banished from Eden at the top. The right nave houses the **Chapel of the Martyrs**, which conserves the remains of **813 citizens of Otranto**, assassinated by the Turks in 1480 for having refused the Islamic faith, and canonized as saints on May 12, 2013. The eleventh-century Crypt below has 72 columns, all with different capitals. ⓘ [Otranto +39 0836801436](tel:+390836801436)



GALLIPOLI

Cathedral of Sant'Agata

Strolling through the old city's alleyways, on the narrow Via Duomo its imposing front suddenly comes into view. It is hard to grasp all its details, given the narrow space it looks out upon. The exterior is surprising with its rich decoration, inspired by the architectural taste of Giuseppe Zimbalo, one of the greatest practitioners of del Leccese Baroque. Inside, we admire the collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century canvasses by Salento and Neapolitan painters, and the richly carved walnut-wood choir. ⓘ [Gallipoli +39 0833262529](tel:+390833262529)

Coastal Towers

The towers are increasingly encountered in **Salento**: **Torre Specchiolla**, **Torre Rinalda** and **Torre Chianca**, **Torre Specchia Ruggeri**, **San Foca**, **Torre dell'Orso**, and **Torre Sant'Andrea**. Access, 3 or 5 meters off the ground, was via ladders that were pulled back up, and the interior was on two stories: the first included a night-time area and the fireplace used for smoke signals; the lower, windowless one rested upon a large cistern to collect water. The largest towers also had a grain mill, in addition to storing weapons and victuals. As elsewhere in the region, many are perched on high, like the circular **Torre del Serpe**, the symbol of Otranto. Tall and solitary, only one half has remained standing, and its fame is linked to a sad tale.

LEGEND

The story is told of a sea serpent that would emerge from the sea to drink the oil of the lighthouse lamp that lit the way for navigators; one stormy night, the serpent drank up all the oil. At that very moment, a galleon of Venetian merchants was crossing the Strait of Otranto, and collided with the rocks in the dark; everyone aboard died. Every so often, at night, near **Torre del Serpe** (see photo), they can be heard walking on the shore.



Salento's most evocative scenarios comes into view – a plain of great beauty where the imposing remains of **Torre Sant'Emiliano** rise absolutely in the middle of nowhere. It is reached on foot; in spite of the sun, the walk is worth it. The view is breathtaking: we can see much of the coastline and – when the tramontane wind is blowing – the mountains of Albania and the nearest Greek islands. The view is just as breathtaking from **Torre Minervino** (see photo p. 86). On the Ionian side, we swim in the shadow of **Torre Pali**, 15 meters from the coast, surrounded by the sea, or at **Torre Mozza** and **Torre San Giovanni**, the Ugento marinas. From here, turning back north, at Santa Maria al Bagno we can admire the imposing **Torre del Fiume**, better known as the tower of the four columns due to the 4 corners still standing. Then there is **Torre dell'Alto**, in Santa Caterina di Nardò, followed by a large stone staircase. It rises on a cliff overlooking the Gulf of Gallipoli and **Parco Naturale Regionale di Porto Selvaggio e Palude del Capitano**. This is one of the area's greenest corners, boasting deep, clear water.



Further north, **Torre Chianca**, towards Porto Cesareo, where the water's nuances become Caribbean-like when the tramontane is blowing, is home to the museum of archaeological finds, whose most important piece is an Egyptian statuette of the god Thon with the appearance of a baboon, from the sixth century BC. Also charming is **Torre Lapillo** (see photo), home to the small Museo del Mare with its exhibition on fishing and shells, Info +39 3343008941 ceaportocesareo.it

The journey among the coastal towers ends on the Ionian coastline, where the province of Lecce ends and the territory of Manduria begins. **Torre Colimena** is striking for its majestic staircase; its interior preserves an original collection of Apulian ceramics, from Laterza to Grottaglie. It is all just a stone's throw from the **Salina Vecchia** or **Salina dei Monaci** salt marsh, which dates back to the Ancient Romans, where flamingos stop year round. In 1464, it belonged to Ferdinand of Aragon; until 1754 it was run by the the Cassino monks of San Lorenzo d'Aversa, and salt production continued through 1812. Today it is a regional reserve, where egrets, stilt plovers, kingfishers, and many other birds make their nests. Between the tower and the salt marsh is a rock resembling a giant turtle, called *capu di cilona*, ready to throw itself into the sea. The open beach is a wonder, the first of a long series of coves protected by immense dunes covered with Mediterranean vegetation. It is a succession of golden sand and low rocks, until arriving at **San Pietro in Bevagna**, with its sixteenth-century tower shaped like a "priest's hat," alongside which the church dedicated to Saint Peter – who, according to legend, is said to have shipwrecked right here in the first century AD. After **Torre Borraco**, the dunes of **Campomarino di Maruggio**, hills of sand covered with sea juniper and lilies, thyme, and other botanical rarities, appear in all their beauty: beyond lies the sea, in its myriad shades of blue.



Carpignano Salentino **Crypt of Santa Cristina**

Two staircases lead to the 9th/10th-century crypt, with 2 naves and 3 apses carved into the tuff stone. It conserves the region's oldest frescoes with certain date, commissioning party, and artists' names, as well as a large number of inscriptions in Greek. A delicate Annunciation scene depicts the Madonna carding wool, and S. Christina with a veil covering her face.

Info +39 33944025798

Giurdignano - Crypt of S. Salvatore

One of the most interesting in the Otranto area, it dates to the seventh-tenth centuries, and was originally completely frescoed. On the central apse we see a fresco with a Madonna flanked by two angels. The beautiful ceiling reveals the designers' great architectural genius and reproduces a coffered ceiling here, a Greek cross there, and a dome as well.

Pro Loco +39 3277824711

Poggiardo - Vaste **Santi Stefani Crypt**

In Parco Archeologico di Vaste, in the rock, the three-naved crypt preserves various depictions of Christendom's first martyr and frescoes that may be dated to between the 10th and 16th c., including portraits of some apostles. Poggiardo is also home to the Crypt of S. Maria degli Angeli, whose frescoes, kept at the museum at Piazza Episcopo, include the Madonna between two archangels.

Info +39 800551155, +39 0836909837

Ugento

Crypt of the Crucifix

This treasure chest of art boasts completely frescoed walls and ceiling. The designs are original: griffons, fantastic figures and plant motifs alternate with crossed black shields symbolizing the Teutonic Knights, and shields bearing a red cross, the emblem of the Templars. The frescoes dated to the twelfth to seventeenth centuries also include a beautiful Madonna holding the Child, wearing an earring.

Ugento +39 0833555476

Casarano

Santa Maria della Croce

Among the most ancient places of Christian worship, built between the fifth and sixth centuries in Casaranello, it possesses splendid Early Christian mosaics, like the starry vault with a cross of golden tesserae on the dome, and the mosaic with animal and plant motifs carpeting the barrel vault. It also boasts Byzantine and Gothic frescoes.

Info +39 3471751019, casaranello.it

Tricase

Madonna del Gonfalone Crypt

Dug into the tuff stone and dating to the ninth-tenth centuries, it was an Italian/Greek monastery and later a grange (a farm/monastery) of the Abbey of Santa Maria de Amato. The ceiling is supported by no fewer than 19 pillars, and the walls show a glimpse of a Sleeping Virgin. **Tricase** +39 0833777237



Index of places

A Acaya p.78-81-82; **Alberobello** p.3-59-61; **Alberona** p.21-23-27; **Alessano** p.79-81; **Altamura** p.3-48-51-57; **Andria** p.3-28-31-35; **B** Bari p. 3-5-37-38-40-41-42-43-46; **Barletta** p.28-31-32; **Bisceglie** p.29-31; **Bitonto** p.3-36-38-46; **Brindisi** p.66-69-70; **Bovino** p. 5-20-23-26; **C** Cagnano Varano p.10-13; **Campomarino di Maruggio** p.89; **Canosa di Puglia** p.28-31; **Carpignano Salentino** p. 3-78-81-90; **Casalabate** p.66-71; **Casarano** p.79-81-91; **Castel del Monte** p. 5-29-31-34-35; **Castel Fiorentino** p. 21-23-25; **Castellaneta** p.49-51-56; **Castro** p.78-81-83; **Cisternino** p.59-61; **Conversano** p.3-37-38-46; **Copertino** p.67-69-74; **Corigliano d'Otranto** p.67-69-77; **E** Egnazia p.58-61; **F** Fasano p.3; **Foggia** p. 3-20-23; **Francavilla Fontana** p.3-66-69; **G** Galatina p.3-67-69-75-77; **Galatone** p.3-67-69-77; **Gallipoli** p.3-79-81-83-85; **Ginosa** p.3-48-51-56; **Gioia del Colle** p.5-37-39-42; **Giovinazzo** p.3-36-38; **Giurdignano** p.78-81-90; **Gravina in Puglia** p.3-5-48-51-56; **Grottaglie** p.49-51-55; **I** Isole Tremiti - **S. Nicola** p.10-13; **L** Laterza p.48-51-56; **Lecce** p.3-66-69-72-73-74-76; **Lesina** p.10-13; **Lucera** p. 5-21-23-25; **Locorotondo** p.59-61; **M** Maglie p.3-67-69; **Manduria** p.66-69-81; **Manfredonia** p.11-13-17; **Martina Franca** p.3-59-61-65; **Massafra** p.49-51-57; **Mesagne** p.3-66-69; **Minervino Murge** p. 30; **Molfetta** p.3-36-38-45-46; **Monopoli** p.37-38-47; **Monte Sant'Angelo** p.5-11-13-14-15-16-17; **Mottola** p.49-51-57; **N** Nardò p.3-67-69-77; **O** Oria p.3-5-66-69; **Orsara di Puglia** p.20-23-26; **Ostuni** p.3-59-61-64; **Otranto** p.3-78-81-82-84-87-88; **P** Peschici p.10-13; **Pietramontecorvino** p.21-23-27; **Polignano a Mare** p.37-38-45; **Poggiardo** p.78-81-90; **Porto Cesareo** p.79-81-89; **Pulsano** p. 3-13-14; **R** Rignano Garganico p.11-13; **Roca Vecchia** p.78-81; **Rocchetta Sant'Antonio** p.20-23-26; **Rodi Garganico** p.10-13; **Roseto Valfortore** p.21-23-27; **Ruffano** p.67-69-77; **Ruvo di Puglia** p.3-29-31-33; **S** Savelletri di Fasano p.58-61-62; **S. Foca** p.87; **S. Giovanni Rotondo** p.11-13; **S. Caterina di Nardò** p. 79-88; **S. Maria al Bagno** p.79-81; **S. Maria di Leuca** p.79-81; **San Nicandro Garganico** p.10-13-19; **S. Pietro in Bevagna** p.79-89; **San Severo** p.3-21-23-27; **Sant'Agata di Puglia** p.20-23-26; **Siponto** p.11-13-18; **Squinzano** p.71; **T** Taranto p.3-49-51-52-53-54; **T. Borraco** p. 89; **T. Canne** p.58-61; **T. Chianca** p. 87-89; **T. Colimena** p.89; **T. dell'Orso** p.78-81-87; **T. Guaceto** p.58-61-62; **T. Lapillo** p. 89; **T. Minervino** p.86-88; **T. Mozza** p.81-88; **T. Pali** p.81-88; **T. Rinalda** p. 87; **T. S. Andrea** p.78-81-87; **T. S. Giovanni** p.81-87; **T. Specchia Ruggeri** p.87; **T. Specchiolla** p.87; **T. Vado** p.81-88; **Torremaggiore** p.21-23-25; **Trani** p.3-29-31-33; **Tricase** p.78-81-91; **Tricase Porto** p.81; **Troia** p. 3-20-23-24; **U** Ugento p.79-81-91; **V** Vaste p.78-81-90; **Vernole** p.82; **Vieste** p.5-10-13-19.

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Franco Cappellari **Castel del Monte** p. 4 - 34, **Norman Castle – Monte Sant'Angelo** p. 16, **Alberobello** p. 60, **Co-Cathedral of Santa Maria dell'Assunzione – Ostuni** p. 64, **Torre Minervino** p. 86 / Vittorio Giannella **Retreat and Sanctuary of San Michele Arcangelo - Monte Sant'Angelo** pp.14-15, **San Leonardo in Lama Volara – Siponto** p. 18, **Daunia** p. 22, **Swabian-Angev in Castle – Lucera** p. 25 / Fabio Massimo Benvenuto **Swabian-Angevin Castle – Manfredonia** p. 17 / WildRatFilm **Assunta Cathedral – Troia** p. 24, **Castello d'Aquino-Rocchetta Sant'Antonio, Sant'Agata di Puglia, Cathedral -Bovino, Sant'Angelo Abbey - Orsara di Puglia** p.26, **Roseto Valfortore, Torre Priorale-Alberona, Pietramontecorvino** p. 27 / Mirabilia Sistemi **Cathedral – San Severo** p. 27, **Cathedral of San Valentino – Bitonto** p. 46, **Mater Domini Sanctuary – Laterza** p. 56 / Vanda Biffani **Castel del Monte** p.31, **Swabian Castle– Barletta** p. 32 / Sergio Chiaffarata **Santa Candida – Bari** p. 46 / GAL Sud Est Barese **Aragonese Castle – Conversano** p. 46 / Carlo Elmiro Bevilacqua **Cathedral - Taranto** p. 54, **Church of the Rosario – Lecce** p. 68-76 / Giuliano Clemente **Santo Stefano – Castellaneta** p. 56 / Leonardo D'Angelo **Castello de' Monti - Corigliano d'Otranto** p. 77, **Angevin Castle – Gallipoli** p. 83, **Torre Lapillo** p. 89 / Richard James Taylor National Geographic **Torre Sant'Andrea** p.80.

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