

Italy—Exploring the Heel of Italy, The Hidden world of Puglia

Tour Manager: Greg Woodford

Saturday 29th March to Sunday 13th April 2025

We cycle through the stunning land and seas of Puglia, the heel of Italy. We see the characteristic Trulli (traditional stone houses) and cycle past stunning seascapes with limpid blue seas and rocks.

We pass by the southernmost point of Puglia, Italy and then head north to Matera, the famous troglodyte town set in rock. Finally, we cycle through the famous Gargano peninsula and into ancient Umbra Forest. This is a 15-day tour which enables us to enjoy the sights of the stunning peninsula.

Itinerary

Saturday 29th March 2025 Arrival and overnight at Giovinazzo, near Bari.

Meet at hotel, prepare for the tour

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (D)

Sunday 30th March 2025 Giovinazzo to Castellano Grotte

Giovinazzo to Castellano Grotte via Bari. We leave Giovinazzo and ride along the stunning coastline with great sea views. We cycle along the coast, through the historic city of Bari, then we head inland to Castellano Grotte, where we stay overnight. Castellano Grotte has a wonderful cave system.

- Route distance: 92.0km
- Route altitude gain: 780m
- Accommodation: Hotel

- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 31st March 2025 Castellano Grotte to Ostuni.

Today we ride along the Valle d'Itria. Plenty of Trulli to see here. We stop at Alberobello, the home of the Trulli. Then, Locorotondo, with its stunning historic centre, the town rotates round the centre and finally the baroque town of Martina Franca. We finish the ride in the really pretty town of Ostuni, high up on a hillside.

- Route distance: 63.0km
- Route altitude gain: 760m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 01st April 2025 Ostuni to Brindisi.

We cycle on quiet roads through the Puglian countryside with the last 10kms along the coast. We ride to Brindisi, an old port town. It is a busy port but has a historic centre with Roman columns. There is some gravel road riding to avoid the main road into Brindisi. Our hotel will be just outside the town.

- Route distance: 52.0km
- Route altitude gain: 200m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 02nd April 2025 Brindisi to Lecce.

We follow the coast as much as possible to Lecce. Lecce is a medieval city with an ancient roman amphitheatre and also several baroque buildings.

- Route distance: 62.0km
- Route altitude gain: 300m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 03rd April 2025 Lecce to Tricase.

The route lies mainly along the coast to Tricase, a village just inland. We pass through Otranto, a lovely seaside town with a mixture of historical sites and charming seascapes.

- Route distance: 80.0km
- Route altitude gain: 650m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 04th April 2025 Tricase to Gallipoli.

Gallipoli is stunning, the historic centre is on an island connected to the mainland by a 17th century bridge. It has a long history being founded by the ancient Greeks. The island is almost completely surrounded by walls. There is also a 13th century Aragonese castle. There are long sandy beaches to the north and south of the town.

- Route distance: 82.0km
- Route altitude gain: 600m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 05th April 2025 Gallipoli to Martina Franca.

It is a long day because accommodation is scarce in the hinterland. We leave Gallipoli and head northwards along the coast. Just before we turn inland, there is Torre Colimena, a village with an old coastal tower. We ride inland through ancient olive groves.

- Route distance: 110.0km
- Route altitude gain: 800m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 06th April 2025 Martina Franca to Matera.

Another long day, the first section through Bosco delle Pianelle, an ancient forest in the heart of Puglia, to Matera.

- Route distance: 84.0km
- Route altitude gain: 800m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 07th April 2025 Free day in Matera.

We have a day to explore the incredible Matera. It is an ancient city carved into the cliffs. It may be the oldest continuously inhabited site in Europe. Lots to see, rock hewn churches, cave houses and wonderful stone streets.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Tuesday 08th April 2025 Matera to Citulo.

The route now heads north. Through Gravina in Puglia where we can visit its underground village with a rock hewn church. With the collapse of the Roman Empire, the inhabitants

moved underground to live in the extensive and pre-existing cave network. Our accommodation is close to Castel del Monte which is also worth viewing.

- Route distance: 80.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1150m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Wednesday 09th April 2025 Citulo to Manfredonia.

Long flat day to Manfredonia. Manfredonia is stunning, an old town on the southern coast of Gargano, great sea views and a medieval castle.

- Route distance: 90.0km
- Route altitude gain: 350m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 10th April 2025 Day 13. Thursday 10 April. Manfredonia to Vieste.

We ride through the mountainous and forested interior of the Gargano Peninsula. The ancient Umbra forest accompanies us. We spend the night on the coast at Vieste, a beautiful historic coastal town.

- Route distance: 73.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1500m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 11th April 2025 Vieste to Manfredonia.

We return to Manfredonia, keeping, as much as possible, on the lovely coast, offering spectacular views over the cliffs and rocky inlets of the peninsula

- Route distance: 95.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1800m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 12th April 2025 Manfredonia to Giovinazzo.

Ride along the coast of Puglia

- Route distance: 95.0km
- Route altitude gain: 400m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Sunday 13th April 2025 Giovinazzo.

Prepare to go home

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £2450

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £250 per person is required as soon as possible once the Tour Manager has processed your Booking Form (see below), with the final balance of £2150 per person to be paid no later than ten weeks prior to departure, by 18 January 2025.

Price includes:

- • 15 nights hotel on half board basis, sharing room.
- • Vehicle support on cycling days.
- • Bikexplore costs.

Price does not include:

- • Travel to and from Italy
- • Travel to and from the airport to the Hotel at Giovinazzo.
- • Drinks with evening meals.
- • Lunches or refreshments during the day.
- • Extra travel costs due to inclement weather or sickness
- • Entry fees at any attractions visited.
- • Any other personal expenses.
- • Travel Insurance.
- • Single occupancy supplement (£300, subject to availability).

Cancellations

Written Notice Received	Cancellation Charge
18 January 2025	£250
From 18 January to departure	£2450

The price of £2450 is based on a minimum number of 8 people taking part in the holiday. If there are insufficient bookings by Saturday 18th January 2025, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

Tour information

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation is generally of a high standard; we will be in lovely 3-star hotels sharing rooms. Single occupancy is limited and subject to availability.

As the holiday is half board, all evening meals are paid for, and usually at the hotel. Often there will be choice but sometimes the menu will be set. Vegetarians, vegans and special diets or requests can be catered for, but we need to know in advance. Please put this down as a 'special request' on your booking form.

Italian meals tend to follow a set format. Anti Pasto, pre meal, cheeses cured meats, Primo, first course, usually pasta, followed by Secondo, meat or fish. Sometimes the meat or fish will have vegetables or salad as an accompaniment. After that there is usually 'Dessert'. Please note that in a set menu you may not get all of that.

Lunches are generally down to you; café stops or picnics.

The nature of the holiday

Most of the holiday will be 60 to 80 km days. However central Puglia is largely flat, so most days there will not be a lot of climbing. As the final trip round the Gargano peninsula is quite mountainous, there will be a lot of climbing on those two days.

Rest Days

There is one rest day mid tour. This is at the ancient town of Matera.

Roads used

Mainly quiet roads, most roads have reasonable tarmac, but some of the smaller ones may be a little rough. There will be a few busier connecting roads especially on the coast. We may need to use some gravel roads to avoid the busier sections.

The area covered by the holiday

The extreme south of Italy has been underdeveloped for centuries, this shows in the agricultural areas, 1000-year-old olive groves, and the ancient pastoral societies.

The architecture is unique to Puglia too, from the conical Trulli, shaped similarly to Kentish Oast Houses, to whitewashed hill villages and baroque town centres. Ostuni and Polignano su Mare are incredibly picturesque.

Puglia is low lying, it is east of the Apennine spine of Italy, plenty of hills inland, but not many long climbs. It stretches from the Gargano Peninsula to the bottom of the heel at Santa Maria di Leuca. Next stop Malta! We touch the edge of Basilicata, the mountainous central region with Matera then head northeast to the Gargano peninsula.

Matera is possibly the oldest continuously inhabited town in Europe, it is built as a series of cave dwellings in the cliffs, 'I Sassi'. There are rock hewn churches, habitations and pathways underground. Matera is not all underground though, plenty of baroque buildings above ground. Pre-war Matera was malarial and poverty stricken, but now it is one of the biggest tourist attractions in the south of Italy. We also visit another 'underground' town, Gravina in Puglia.

Route Information

Route sheets and GPX files will be provided.

Group information

The maximum group size will be 18, plus the Tour Manager and driver.

Weather and Clothing

The weather is typically Mediterranean and therefore usually good in south Italy during this time. When I reconnoitered the route in April 2024, the temperature hovered between 23 and 28°C, however, it is early spring so expect anything, please ensure you bring good wet weather clothing.

Cycles / Equipment

We recommend a good audax/ gravel type bike, however, since no luggage needs to be carried you can bring your lightweight road bike. Be aware that some of the roads are very small and can be rough, I recommend larger tyres than usual to avoid any problems. I reconnoitered the route on a mountain bike but will be bringing my road bike.

You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes. Some climbs are long so a low bottom gear (i.e., small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended. If you are unsure about gears, please discuss with the Tour Manager. New tyres and inner tubes are recommended. Participants will be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools each day to deal with punctures and minor repairs.

The support vehicle will not be far away in case of dramatic changes in the weather. You will not need to carry luggage, but a saddlebag, rack pack or bar bag will be useful for

carrying wet weather gear, spare clothing needed for the day, camera, snacks and your map. Each participant is expected to bring and carry their personal items and spares. Helmets are your personal choice as there is no legal requirement for these to be worn in Italy.

Maps

Although you will be provided with route notes and GPX files and there will be a support vehicle as well as the Tour Manager, please bring a map with you in case you get separated from the group. Touring Club Italy maps are a good choice; the TCI map of Puglia covers all of the route. Local more detailed maps are the Euro Cart maps, I have not found them in the UK, but they are readily available in bookshops in Italy.

Travel

Travel to the start and from the finish is not included in this holiday. Thus, it is very important that you note that neither your Tour Manager nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements, you should ensure that the tour is definitely going ahead. Should there be insufficient bookings we reserve the right to cancel the tour at any time. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation or wait until you have been told the tour will go ahead. In the event of the tour being cancelled we will not be responsible for any losses incurred outside what you pay us.

There are a few airports in Puglia, Bari, which is the closest, there are also airports in Brindisi and Ancona. There are some trains along the coast, but it is in no way as accessible by public transport as other more developed areas of Europe. The start town is very easily accessible from Bari airport.

Travel insurance advice

Italy is in Europe, but Britain is no longer in the EU. Your EHIC card is valid until its expiry date, but it cannot be renewed. Instead a Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) has been introduced (see <https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/apply-for-a-free-uk-global-health-insurance-card-ghic/>). However, at present Britain no longer has a reciprocal health agreement with Italy, though this might change before the start of the tour. Appropriate travel insurance is therefore essential; please check with your provider to ensure that they cover the revised conditions in Europe. Although most travel insurance policies do not cover cancellation due to pandemic restrictions, the money you pay to us for the holiday is fully protected until we depart.