

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

Tour Manager: Greg Woodford

Saturday 29th March to Saturday 12th April 2025

A stunning route in Puglia, the 'Heel of Italy'. Exploring quiet villages, little ridden roads and the astonishing, often troglodytic architecture. We travel along the stunning limpid blue coast and through ancient olive groves, into towns with beautiful untouched squares and buildings.

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.

We stay mainly in beautiful 3* hotels.

Itinerary

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

Meet at the hotel, prepare for the holiday.

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

Sunday 30th March 2025 Giovinazzo to Castellano Grotte

Ride through Bari to Castellano Grotte

- Route distance: 92.0km
- Route altitude gain: 770m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 31st March 2025 Castellano Grotte to Ostuni

Ride through the Valle d'Itria

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

Tuesday 01st April 2025 Ostuni to Brindisi

Route to the historic port of Brindisi

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

Wednesday 02nd April 2025 Brindisi to Lecce

Coastal ride to Lecce

- Route distance: 65.0km
- Route altitude gain: 300m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Thursday 03rd April 2025 Lecce to Tricase

Coastal ride to Tricase

- Route distance: 80.0km
- Route altitude gain: 660m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Friday 04th April 2025 Tricase to Gallipoli

Ride round the southernmost point to the historic town of Gallipoli

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

Saturday 05th April 2025 Gallipoli to Martina Franca

Long ride inland to the baroque town of Martina Franca

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

Sunday 06th April 2025 Martina Franca to Matera

We cycle to the stunning town of Matera

- Route distance: 83.0km
- Route altitude gain: 800m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, D)

Monday 07th April 2025 Rest day at Matera

Day to visit Matera

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

Tuesday 08th April 2025 Matera to Citulo

Inland via another underground town to Citulo

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

Wednesday 09th April 2025 Citulo to Manfredonia

Through the ancient peasant landscape

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

Thursday 10th April 2025 Manfredonia to Vieste

The Gargano Mountains

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

Friday 11th April 2025 Vieste to Manfredonia

Along the Gargano coast

- Route distance: 95.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1800m
- Accommodation: Hotel

- Meals: (B, D)

Saturday 12th April 2025 Manfredonia to Giovinazzo

A long flat coastal ride back to Giovinazzo.

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

Sunday 13th April 2025 Giovinazzo to home

Tour ends after breakfast

- No cycling
- Accommodation: None
- 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 half board at 3 * hotels or agriturismo
- Vehicle support
- 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
- Lunch and 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

Cancellations

Written Notice Received	Cancellation Charge
18 January 2025	250
29 March 2025	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

Grade and area covered by the holiday

- The maximum number of participants will be 18 plus the tour Managers and driver. We will stay in good and mid-range hotels and agriturismo. All rooms have en-suite facilities. This holiday is classed as Moderate to Energetic.
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- We will be travelling through the areas of Puglia in South East Italy. the 'heel'. The terrain varies between rolling to mountainous in the Gargano Peninsular. Of particular interest, we will visit The historic towns of Lecce, Gallipoli, Matera and Manfredonia.
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- 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.
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- 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. The Gargano is a regional park, mountains dropping down to a coast set with coves and rocky inlets. you will find wooded areas with lush pine forests, mountainous landscapes, forests, a spectacular coast full of white limestone cliffs, sea caves, long beaches sandy beaches and villages overlooking the sea. The variety of the landscape is amazing.
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- 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.

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Travel and communication

- The tour starts and finishes in Giovinazzo near Bari. It is 14 kms from Bari airport. Bari has planes from the UK. The nearest rail station is at Giovinazzo which has trains from Bari Airport, though you will need to change at Bari.
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- 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 Leader 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.
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- Should there be insufficient bookings or pandemic travel restrictions are re-imposed, 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.
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- Transfer to and from the train station or airport is not included in this holiday nor is transfer of your bicycle.
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- We will use WhatsApp to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any emergencies on route. Ideally everyone will bring a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group.
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- If you are unable to join the WhatsApp group I can only communicate with you in an emergency.

Accommodation

- The maximum number of participants will be 18 plus the tour Managers and driver.
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- We will stay in 15 good mid-range hotels or agriturismo. All rooms have en-suite facilities. Prices are based on two people sharing a room. When booking with a partner to share please specify twin or double beds.
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- If you book a single room, please note that they can be of a lower standard than twin or double rooms even though single rooms may incur a supplement.
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Meals

- Meals - We will be catering for ourselves throughout the holiday. We will source and pay for meals ourselves.
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- On all days breakfast and dinner will be provided for us at or near our accommodation, however, you will need to source and pay for lunch yourselves.
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- We will frequently be travelling through rural areas and will stop at cafes during the rides whenever possible but you should buy and carry sufficient food and drink for lunch in case of emergencies.
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- Check which meals are provided in the Payment Schedule and ensure you have access to sufficient monies to cover any meals you will need to buy. Most places in Italy accept card payments, but some more rural shops and cafe still do not.
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- Check that you have informed the Tour Leader of any dietary requirements, especially any allergies, in your Booking Form. Please remember to pack any medications that you need to take regularly.
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- Meals, often there will 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.
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- 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, Please note that drinks are usually down to you.

Cycles and equipment

- A touring cycle, hybrid, tandem, recumbent or lightweight road bike would all be suitable for this holiday, since we will endeavour to avoid tracks if possible. You should ensure your cycle is well maintained, paying particular attention to wheels, tyres and brakes.
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- A low bottom gear (eg. small chainring the same size or smaller than the largest cog on your rear wheel) is recommended; if unsure about gears, please talk to the Bikeplore Leader about them.
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- Lights are recommended in the very unlikely event of arriving back late and useful if walking outdoors at night. A bell is advised and bring a bike lock for security. Water bottles are required to ensure you are hydrated at all times.

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- You will be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs, including two inner tubes, a spare gear cable, split link and spare brake pads. There may not be many bike shops on route and they are never when you need them. You are advised to use 28mm tyres, or larger, to suit the variable terrain.
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- You will not need to carry luggage, but a rack-top pack or bar bag will be useful for carrying wet weather gear, spare clothing needed for the day, camera, emergency rations and a map. If you need advice please contact the Bikexplore Tour Organiser.
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Ride and rest days

- The holiday is for 15 days and has 1 rest day. It is a moving on holiday staying in a different location most nights.
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- Most of the roads are minor and used by rural will be hilly in parts. Though we may need to use some busier roads at times, especially when entering and leaving the bigger

towns however, we do avoid them as much as possible. There may be some gravel tracks to avoid some of these roads.

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- Most of each cycling day may be spent cycling. People will be expected to ride at their own pace and often in loose groups, at around 10-15 mph on the flat, slower up hills, usually meeting up at cafes for lunch and refreshment breaks. You will be notified of the two or three available or recommended refreshment stops each day. It is expected that you may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore some local object and this is okay. You are on holiday.
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- Inevitably, you might consider parts of the route hilly so you need to be fit to get the most out of this tour. It is essential to get out on your bike and do some longer rides before the tour starts. There may be steep descents too, so you should be able to negotiate these safely.
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- Please note it may not always be possible to follow the itinerary exactly due to road works or weather etc, as things do not always go as planned. In these circumstances, you will be advised of alternative arrangements.
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- As per my Biography, I will usually not ride at the front of the group but generally towards the back so I can support the slower riders, so you will need to be aware of the route and likely stopping places each day.

Weather clothing and culture

- Lightweight clothing, suitable for a range of temperatures, is needed and possibly smarter, warmer clothing for the evenings.
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- Lightweight waterproofs and windproofs will be needed, please ensure you bring good, breathable waterproofs as we are riding in early spring. Sun cream, lip balm and sun glasses are recommended along with insect repellent and bite cream. My packing list is available on request - advisable if this is your first tour.
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- Mediterranean climate
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- Temperatures in April are likely to be between 18 and 25 degrees on average some rainfall can be expected though. When I reconnoitred the route, in April 2024, we have dry weather of up to 28 degrees. The weather is slightly more predictable than the UK but still variable and with increased temperature and possibility of severe storms.
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- Culture. In Italy it is frowned upon to visit churches with short shorts and or sleeveless tops. Please bring a lightweight garment to cover up with. Modern cycling shorts that are not too short are usually OK. Ladies who wear short shorts usually bring knee or

full-length trousers for wearing off the bike or buy a cheap, lightweight wrap-around skirt.

Maps and guides

- A gpx of each day's route and detailed route notes, will be provided before the tour.
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- Recommended paper maps are the TCI regional maps. More detailed Eurocart maps can often be found in local bookshops.

Travel insurance and vaccination

- For UK nationals traveling abroad travel insurance is essential. Please check if your insurer has requirements for cyclists eg wearing a helmet or cycle touring.
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- Currently, Covid and Influenza vaccinations are recommended for participants of 75 years of age and over and those deemed medically vulnerable.
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- There are no recommended vaccinations or anti-malarial drugs recommended for Italy. However, it is useful, if your hepatitis and tetanus jabs are up to date.
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- www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice
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Passports VISAs and monies

- UK citizens must hold a passport that is still valid for at least six months at the end of the tour.
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- Europe is moving to the ETIAS scheme where all UK citizens will need to apply for this. It is essentially a VISA waiver scheme. These will need to be applied for 30 days before travelling. https://travel-europe.europa.eu/index_en. Currently the scheme is not in operation, it is envisaged that it will be rolled out during the first half of 2025. Keep an eye on the news. Holders of non-UK passports are advised to check whether they require a visa.
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- The local currency is the Euros, most shops and cafes in Italy take cards, but some in the more rural areas may not. Please ensure you have sufficient cash.
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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 or pandemic travel restrictions are re-imposed, 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.
- It may be possible to take your bike down at a cost, please talk to the tour manager.

EHIC and GHIC cards

- 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/>).

About the organiser

- I am a keen cyclist, trained cycle instructor, ride leader and mechanic, able to support members of the group who require it. I have managed a number of tours for CTC Holidays and Tours and Bikexplore, and I have toured extensively in Europe and further afield. I speak Italian and have lived in Italy for a number of years. I reconnoitred the area in April 2024. For more information about my style of managing cycling holidays, please see my Biography on the site.

About Bikexplore

- Bikexplore was formed in 2021 but former leaders of CTC Holidays

TTA

- Bikexplore is a member of TTA, meaning extra protection for your holiday
- <https://thetravelnetworkgroup.co.uk/travel-trust-association/>
-