

ABRUZZO, PUGLIA & MATERA

MYSTERIES OF THE MEZZOGIORNO

Rocca Calascio,
Abruzzo

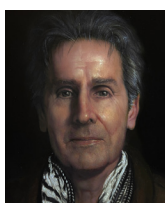
OVERVIEW

Known as the Mezzogiorno – also the Italian word for midday – and once a part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the Italian peninsula's southernmost regions are exceedingly rich in Greco-Roman, Norman, French and Spanish cultural residues.

This new 16-day tour, led by artist and historian Neil Moore, begins with the spectacular natural beauty, enchanting villages and Roman ghost towns of the mountainous Abruzzo area, where an ancient pagan past is barely concealed beneath an apparently modern surface.

We then unravel the many layers of the picturesque Puglia region, with its Norman castles, fascinating stone “trulli” and white-washed towns encapsulating millennia of Greek, Roman and Byzantine civilization. Our journey concludes with the ancient Sassi cave complex of Matera, a settlement that is possibly the oldest continually inhabited city in the world.

By day, we experience stunning architecture, world-class archaeological sites, medieval, Roman and ancient Greek art, and the vibrant food and wine of the region – arguably among the best of Italy's gastronomy. While at night, we enjoy staying in some of the most unique accommodation options ever offered.



TOUR LEADER

Neil Moore is an award-winning illustrator, artist and art historian who has lived in Umbria, Italy for over 30 years. He has an Honours degree in Fine Arts from the University of Sydney.

TOUR DATES

September 15-30, 2024

TOUR PRICE

\$11,920 per person, twin share
\$2,470 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Santo Stefano di Sessanio (2 nights), Sulmona (3 nights), Giovinazzo (3 nights), Ostuni (4 nights), Matera (3 nights)

INCLUSIONS

15 nights' accommodation in 4 and 5-star hotels. All breakfasts, 5 lunches, 4 dinners, 1 wine-tasting and 1 apericena, complimented with a folklore dance-class. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Start & Finish

The tour starts at 2.30pm on Sunday 15 September, at Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino Airport, Rome. The tour ends at c.11.00am on Monday 30 September, at Bari Karol Wojtyła Airport, Bari.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D and WT for wine-tasting and A for apericena.

Sunday 15 September

Arrival

Meet your tour leader at Rome's Fiumicino Airport in the early afternoon for a coach transfer to the Abruzzo region, where we settle into our unique accommodation in the medieval village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, high in the Apennine mountains. Now given new life as home to a design hotel, this spectacular location in the Gran Sasso National Park will serve as our base for the next two nights. After time to freshen up, enjoy a welcome dinner at the accommodation where you will be treated to a range of local recipes all made using fresh food grown in the neighbouring fields. Overnight Santo Stefano (D)

Monday 16 September

Remote castles and Roman ruins

In the morning we take a trip up to Campo Imperatore at the foot of the Gran Sasso massif, a glacial high plain and site of the hotel from which Mussolini was snatched by German paratroopers in 1943. We then explore one of Italy's most spectacular castles at Calascio where we enjoy a traditional lunch before descending to explore the Roman ghost town of Peltuinum below. Please note that part of the excursion today involves walking over uneven surfaces and therefore it may not be possible for all guests to undertake this segment. Overnight Santo Stefano (B, L)

Tuesday 17 September

Fine art and local cuisine

Departing Santo Stefano this morning we travel to the village of Bominaco to visit today's highlight, the magnificent 13th century fresco cycle within what was once a Benedictine monastery. The original Abbey was founded by Charlemagne in the 8th century AD on the site of a former pagan temple and the current structure now combines graphic biblical narratives with astrological calendars and the phases of the moon. Lunch nearby in a local restaurant. We then continue onwards to Sulmona, the so called 'City of Love' and birthplace of the celebrated Roman poet Ovid. After checking in we take a tour of this elegant provincial capital nestling at the foot of the majestic Maiella mountain range. Overnight Sulmona (B, L)

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Esoteric Stone Trulli

Marvel at the enigmatic trulli in Puglia's Itria valley. These exceptionally picturesque dry-stone structures have their origins in the 17th century and often feature esoteric or spiritual symbols on their conical roofs.

Baroque splendour in Lecce

Delight in the extravagant "Barocco Leccese", a style recognised by UNESCO for its exuberant combination of figurative and architectural detail sculpted in Lecce's honey-toned local stone.

Millennia of Tradition in Matera

Take a glimpse into what was the traditional, yet challenging, way of life in the "Sassi" of Matera, a troglodyte city that is possibly the world's oldest continually inhabited town.

Norman Cathedrals and Castles

Discover the legacy of the Normans, from Frederick II's extraordinary octagonal Castel del Monte to the austere beauty of Trani's seafront cathedral.

The best of Italian regional cuisine

Enjoy hand-made pasta, freshly caught fish, olive oil from ancient groves, robust wines and a variety of fine local produce in the traditional trattorie and regional ristoranti.



**Oratorio of
Bominaco**



**Trani
Cathedral**



Castel del Monte

Wednesday 18 September

The City of Love

This morning is market day in Sulmona. After a brief visit to the local market, we travel to the Roman ruins of Corfinium, the original capital of the Italic people in the 1st Century BC. We then proceed to the remarkable Abbazia di Santo Spirito di Morrone, an abbey complex founded by followers of Abruzzo's favourite Saint, 13th century Pope Celestine V, and used during the war as a repository for British prisoners of war. Tonight we will enjoy dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Sulmona (B, D)

Thursday 19 September

Faith and Folklore

Today we go to the hilltown of Cocullo, renowned for its spring snake festival and guild of snake charmers – an unusual blending of folklore and faith. We then travel through spectacular country along the gorge of the river Sagittario to visit the hidden gem of Scanno, pausing to admire the turquoise water of the two lakes on the way. We will return to Sulmona early afternoon, with time to enjoy the town's impressive passeggiata before free time in the evening for dinner. Overnight Sulmona (B)

Friday 20 September

Quintessential Puglia

Departing the Abruzzo, we travel south to the Puglia region, pausing for lunch at a seaside town before heading on to our destination at Giovinazzo. This picturesque harbour town is renowned for its wonderful majestic square, maybe one of the most beautiful in Puglia and is unique in Italy due to its particular trapezium shape. On arrival, we make our way to our hotel, housed in an impressive converted 13th-century monastery, spectacularly located on the seafront. We enjoy a leisurely stroll around the Old Town, followed by the evening at leisure. Overnight Giovinazzo (B, L)

Saturday 21 September

The Colossus of Barletta

This morning we make our way along Puglia's Adriatic coast to the elegant seaside town of Trani. Here we enjoy a guided walking tour, exploring the harmonious limestone architecture, impressive Swabian fortress and majestic Norman cathedral built directly on the waterfront. Following free time for lunch we proceed to the neighbouring town of Barletta to view the Colossus, an enormous bronze statue of an Eastern Roman Emperor, nearly three times life size. Returning to our hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Giovinazzo (B)

Sunday 22 September

Extraordinary Octagonal Castle

In the 13th century, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II gave orders to build an extraordinary octagonal structure now known as Castel del Monte. It was the inspiration for Umberto Eco's murder mystery novel, 'The Name of the Rose' and its original purpose is still debated. After a guided tour of this national monument, we have lunch in the vicinity and then proceed to charming Bitonto, home to another great Norman cathedral, the largest in southern Italy. On returning to our hotel, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Giovinazzo (B, L)

Trulli



Monday 23 September

Laid-back seaside life

Departing Giovinazzo, we make our way to the town of Monopoli whose whitewashed houses contrast perfectly with turquoise waters lapping at the walls. In nearby Polignano a Mare where the old town is sited dramatically directly on the cliff tops we have free time for lunch before continuing on to our destination near Ostuni. In the evening we have a welcome dinner at our accommodation – a fortified estate known as a Masseria – surrounded by ancient olive groves with some trees over 2,000-years-old. Overnight Ostuni (B, D)

Tuesday 24 September

The White Town

After a relaxed start this morning we take a guided tour through the maze of narrow alleyways in the Old Town of Ostuni, where the ubiquitous limewash used on the houses has led to its appellation The White Town. Here we admire Romanesque and Baroque buildings and view the striking remains of a 28,000-year-old paleolithic woman, 'The Lady from Ostuni'. Afterwards the evening and night are at leisure – the perfect chance to unwind with a refreshing dip or a delicious aperitivo by the hotel pool. Overnight Ostuni (B)

Lecce



Wednesday 25 September

The Remarkable Trulli

The eye-catching conical stone structures known as “trulli” have rightly become the most famous visual image of Puglia and today we go to the picturesque heart of trullo territory, pausing to admire an amazing collection of local plants at a botanical garden on the way. After a visit to one of Puglia’s prettiest towns, Locorotondo, there is free time for lunch and individual sightseeing before continuing to the elegantly baroque town of Martina Franca for a guided tour. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Ostuni (B)

Thursday 26 September

The Crown Jewel

This morning we set out with a local guide to explore Lecce, the crown jewel of the Mezzogiorno which is often described as the Florence of the south. There is a fine range of monuments to visit, including Roman ruins and the exuberant 16th and 17th-century architecture spread throughout the town. It is this for which Lecce is most notable; an expressive and highly decorative incarnation of the Southern Baroque genre replete with gargoyles, asparagus columns and cavorting gremlins. In the afternoon, we explore the ancient art of papier-mâché production, a phenomenon mastered by the skilled craftsmen of Lecce, before returning to our accommodation where we have an apericena accompanying a demonstration of and lesson in the traditional “Pizzica-pizzica” dance. Overnight Ostuni (B, A)

Matera



Friday 27 September

Magna Graecia

Departing Ostuni today, we travel to the region of Basilicata via the historic city of Taranto, founded in the 8th century BC and once a major centre of Magna Graecia. We stop to view the many

ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation on this tour is quite exceptional, with two of our locations being the “Albergo Diffuso” variety in which each of the rooms is different with its own unique style. Our starting point at Santo Stefano in Abruzzo was Italy’s first of this type, combining high tech with ancient interiors for an unforgettable experience, while our accommodation in Matera gives a whole new meaning to the idea of cave dwelling. And Masseria Ayroldi near Ostuni is a fortified estate – a farmhouse protected by ancient-walls and surrounded by olive trees.

With the nature of these places, there will be a variety in the size and appointments of individual rooms.

Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Sextantio Albergo Diffuso
(2 nights)

www.sextantio.it

Sulmona, Hotel Rojan
(3 nights)

www.hotelrojan.it

Giovinazzo, Hotel San Martin
(3 nights)

www.s.martinhotel.it

Ostuni, Masseria Ayroldi
(4 nights)

www.ayroldimasseria.com

Matera, Le Grotte della Civita
(3 nights)

www.sextantio.it

WEATHER

This tour takes place in Autumn. It will most likely be cooler in the Abruzzo and relatively mild in Puglia with maximum temperatures around 20-25°C during the day, dropping to 10-15°C at night. There is of course some chance of rain.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Two

This tour is designed for people who lead active lives. Please see our website for more information.

artefacts recovered from the surrounding sites and tombs in the region at the National Archaeological Museum, one of the most comprehensive in Italy. After lunch in a local restaurant, we head inland to our last accommodation, an “albergo diffuso” at Matera, with the evening at leisure. Overnight Matera (B, L)

Saturday 28 September Troglodyte City

Today we enjoy a walking tour of Matera. This troglodyte city with its fascinating rupestrian churches has been inhabited since paleolithic times and was declared European capital of culture in 2019. Known as the “sassi” – the Italian word for stones – it is dramatically situated on the slopes of intersecting ravines whose naturally occurring caves were progressively expanded into living spaces through the centuries of classical and medieval times by the local population. These days the underground residences are being reinhabited and provide a range of interesting accommodation options. The afternoon and evening are at leisure, with optional visits to an underground heated spa if requested. Overnight Matera (B)

Sunday 29 September Chapel of Original Sin

The continuous presence of human activity in the territory of Matera is not just limited to the famous Sassi but was also present in the surrounding valleys. Within one of these ravines lies the rupestrian Chapel of the Original Sin, famous for its beguilingly beautiful frescoes. Commissioned by Basilian monks in the 8th century AD, its narrative pictorial cycle features some of the oldest Christian paintings in existence. After the visit there we enjoy a wine-tasting before returning for free time in Matera for lunch. In the afternoon you may join an optional visit to the Carlo Levi I museum. Levi was the author of the Italian classic ‘Christ stopped at Eboli’ which brought Matera to the world’s attention. We will conclude our tour with a farewell dinner in a local restaurant this evening. Overnight Matera (B, WT, D)

Monday 30 September Departure

This morning we transfer by coach from Matera to Bari Airport, where the tour ends. (B)



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Sharon Williams** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

sharon@academytravel.com.au



academytravel.com.au