

ITALY WITH FRIENDS
Puglia Tour – The Heel of the Boot
October 3 – 12, 2020

(Itinerary is subject to change and variations with and/or without notice.)

Day 0 - Depart USA – Friday, October 2, 2020

You will fly into Bari Karol Wojtyła (BRI) airport. (Remember you will arrive in Europe the day after you depart the USA.)

Day 1 - Arrival Day - Benvenuto! - Welcome to Italy – Saturday, October 3, 2020

Welcome to **Puglia**, the sunny and windy “heel of the Italian boot”. Arrive into Bari and the Palace Hotel to meet with the group by 4PM. The region of Puglia (or Apulia) has been tempting travelers since the ancient Greeks first glimpsed its rugged coastal beauty centuries ago. This region has a diverse cultural heritage like no other in Italy that has left its mark on everything from architecture, languages and even the food. Olive oil production has been an important part of this region for centuries and the huge 1000-year old trees can attest to that.

Bari, the capital of Puglia is an ancient seaport with narrow lanes and a colorful harbor. We will visit this historic port and its “old town” on a guided tour. The 11th century Basilica di San Nicola, which houses the relics of Bari’s patron, Saint Nicholas, is a major site and one of Bari’s most beautiful. Afterwards, we will enjoy a welcome dinner with an amazing view of the harbor. (D)

Day 2 – The Symbol of Puglia – Sunday, October 4, 2020

We will begin our discovery of this region with a visit to nearby **Castel del Monte**, a UNESCO World Heritage site (the first of many on this tour) and the symbol of the region of Puglia. It was built in the 13th century by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. It is built in an octagonal pattern, with octagonal towers on each corner. It was precisely planned, but its purpose remains a mystery to this day. Our guided tour will be followed by a delicious lunch in a nearby “Slow Food” restaurant.

Staying in a “*Masseria*”, a historic farm center, is the perfect way to learn a bit more about this region’s cultural heritage. Each Masseria differed in size with a main house for the owners and originally with all the estate’s workers living together among the fortified buildings. Masseria Torricella is typical of this type of accommodation found all over the region. Set in rolling hills with orchards and vineyards, Masseria Torricella is the perfect spot to call home for a few nights as we explore the surrounding area. We will settle in and enjoy a dinner prepared at the Masseria using mainly the farm’s own produce. (B) (L) (D) Moderate

Day 3 – The Magical Itria Valley - Monday, October 5, 2020

Today will be a wonderful day of discovery as we visit three of the amazing villages in the Itria Valley. First stop will be **Cisternino**, where you will stroll through the narrow streets of a picturesque medieval village.

Next, we will visit the “white town” of **Ostuni**. Here you find a cluster of whitewashed buildings perched on a hilltop overlooking the coast, and an expanse of enormous olive trees. There will be time to learn a bit about the region’s olive oil production while in Ostuni, as well as enjoy lunch together.

After lunch we will head to the nearby coast dotted with some lovely villages that cling to the limestone cliffs molded by the Adriatic Sea. We will make a stop in **Polignano a Mare**, renowned for its breathtaking balconies with views to the crashing waves of the sea below. This town was the end of one of the famous “Roman Roads”, and you can still see some of the remains of this route. It is also the birthplace of the Italian singer, Domenico Modugno famous for ‘*Volare*.’ After such a wonderful

day of exploration, we will return to the hotel for a quiet evening and dinner together. (B) (L) (D) Moderate

Day 4 – Into the Fairytale, Alberobello – Tuesday, October 6, 2020

You will have some time to enjoy Masseria Torricella this morning. You might want to check out the services for body and mind wellness like the massage room or swimming pool with hydromassage. Perhaps spend some time trekking in the woods. We will enjoy a light lunch together at the Masseria.

Later, we will drive to nearby **Alberobello**, another UNESCO World Heritage site, and yes, you will think that you have entered a Fairytale! This unique town has streets lined with 'trulli'. Trulli are small limestone houses famed for their distinctive conical-shaped roofs stacked of stone tiles without mortar. Most were built 300-400 years ago. There will be plenty of time to explore this magical place and to learn about why and how these dwellings were built, and about the cryptic symbols painted on many of the roof-cones. You can also visit the Trullo Sovrano Museum to understand what it was like to actually live in a trulli. Alberobello is the 'trulli' capital and you will find these strange white buildings crowding the narrow streets. The trulli are a unique example of ancient architecture that survives today. Many are shops, restaurants, and there is even a trulli cathedral. Eventually, we will settle into one of these restaurants for dinner together before returning to Masseria Torricella. (B) (L) (D) Light

Day 5 - Lecce, the Crown Jewel of the Mezzogiorno - Wednesday, October 7, 2020

This morning we will move south and visit more of lovely Puglia. First stop will be the picturesque medieval village of **Locorotondo**, whose name means "round place". Here gleaming white buildings swirl down the contours of a hilltop setting. This village was voted as one of the "*Borghi piu belli d'Italia*" or one of the most beautiful villages of Italy.

Then we head to the town of **Lecce**, known as "The Florence of the South". We will spend the next two nights here while exploring the Salento Peninsula. Lecce has an amazing history and traditions. From its Roman heritage, you find the Amphitheatre set in the center of town. Lecce also has an abundance of baroque architecture in its churches and palaces that is unlike any found elsewhere in Italy. You will have a guided tour and learn all about its secrets. Lecce has a sprawling town center and you will have plenty of free time to check it out before we meet in the evening to enjoy our meal together to taste the famous local cuisine. (B) (D) Moderate

Day 6 – Gallipoli Heritage - Thursday, October 8, 2020

Today we will explore one of Puglia's gems - **Gallipoli**. Gallipoli, a quaint fishing village, whose name comes from ancient Greek, "Kalle Polis", meaning "beautiful city". We will visit Gallipoli's old town, built on an island now connected to the mainland by a bridge. There will be time to explore its maze of alleys, the Cathedral and an underground oil mill dating back to the 14th century. We will also savor some fantastic seafood in one of the best Apulian restaurants for lunch.

The area of the Salento Peninsula has been producing wine for centuries. Near the town of Nardo, you will have the opportunity to taste wines such as Primitivo, Negromaro, Sussumaniello, Aglianico and Bombino Bianco at several vineyard stops. We will return to Lecce for the evening. (B) (L) Moderate

Day 7 – Otranto and the Lovely Adriatic – Friday, October 9, 2020

We begin the day in the stunning seaside town of **Otranto**, one of Puglia's most vibrant towns, overlooking a stunning harbor recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. Otranto was also named as one of the "*Borghi piu belli d'Italia*". Here we will explore the charming historical center and visit the beautiful cathedral boasting breathtaking mosaics and the skulls and bones of 800 martyrs. It is here that St Peter is fabled to have celebrated the first western mass and also from where crusaders and the knight templars left for the Holy Land. On a clear day you can see Albania across the Adriatic from the easternmost part of Italy. It is actually only about 50 miles away. There will be time for lunch together before we head down the coast a bit for breathtaking views of the sea and a photo-stop at an ancient Roman watch tower.

Then we will leave the region of Puglia for a bit to visit the nearby region of **Basilicata** and the town of **Matera**, another UNESCO World Heritage site. We will settle in at Hotel Il Belvedere with a view over the famous Sassi dwellings of Matera that is amazing. In fact, this hotel may be one of the most unusual that you have ever stayed in. The hotel's breakfast room is actually in an old cave. Some of the rooms are even built into the caves. You will need to rest up, for tomorrow you will have a full day of sightseeing in this amazing city. (B) (L) Moderate

Day 8 – Matera, a Step Back in Time - Saturday, October 10, 2020

Today, you will truly step back in time as you explore one of the oldest continually inhabited settlements in the world. The oldest cave dwellings go back to the Bronze Age. The town consists of houses called "Sassi". These prehistoric caverns, and more than 100 rock-hewn churches, are carved into the soft rock straddling both sides of a steep ravine. The honeycombed dwellings were continuously inhabited until 1952 when the government relocated the population. We will learn all about Matera, both its history and its current popularity. Matera has been used in several films like Mel Gibson's *"The Passion of the Christ"*, as well as *"Wonder Woman"*. You will see it in the next James Bond movie soon. It is easy to see how this city can be the perfect film location when you imagine it completely removed from the modern age for centuries.

After your guided tour, there will be time for your own exploration of Matera. Later, we will dine together in a very "stylish cave" at Ristorante Dedalo. (B) (D) Strenuous

Day 9 – Trani, the "Pearl of Puglia" – Sunday, October 11, 2020

This morning we say farewell to Matera and return to the region of Puglia for a visit to the "Pearl of Puglia", the port town of **Trani**. During the middle ages this small, lively whitewashed port of Jewish origin bustled with mercantile activity. Today it is renowned for sweet Moscato di Trani wine and some of Puglia's finest architecture including the majestic Duomo built in the 12th century.

Finally, we will make our way to our overnight destination near the Bari Airport for our last evening together. I am sure our farewell dinner will be filled with fun and many new stories to share about our time in the "heel of the boot". (B) (D) Light

Day 10 - Arrivederci Italia! – Monday, October 12, 2020

It is time to say "arrivederci". You will make your way to the Bari Airport to catch your flight home. Parting will be such sweet sorrow, but I know you will take along wonderful memories of time spent enjoying all the wonders of Puglia with new friends. (B)

(Included meals are designated each day with (B) for breakfast, (L) for lunch, and (D) for dinner.)

THE FOLLOWING IS INCLUDED IN YOUR ITALY WITH FRIENDS TOUR:

- 9 nights' accommodation in 3-4 star, centrally located hotels with private bath or shower.
- Extensive meal plan: 9 breakfasts (B), 5 lunches (L), 7 dinners (D) We eat a lot together on this tour!
- All ground transportation in Italy during tour. (Does not include airfare.)
- Does not include transfer to or from the Bari Airport on arrival or departure day.
- Guided sightseeing and entrance fees to select sights, wineries and museums as described in itinerary.
- Local VAT taxes and government fees, gas, highway tolls and parking fees.
- Pre-tour visit with helpful travel information.
- Plenty of memories to last a lifetime.
- Surprises along the way.

NOT INCLUDED IN TOUR:

- Does not include airfare.
- Does not include remaining meals, alcoholic or non-alcoholic drinks at included meals.
- Does not include personal expenses such as internet use, laundry, mini-bar, or extra transportation in tour towns.
- Does not include travel insurance.
- Does not include city tax required in each hotel. Can range from 1 – 6 Euro per person per night.

ITALY WITH FRIENDS 2020 - LAND ONLY TOUR PRICES:

Tour begins and ends in Bari.

Tour is for 10days/9nights.

The total cost per person is **\$3599.00** with double occupancy.

(Includes Euro exchange rate adjustment. Does not include local city hotel tax)

Traveling solo? Sadly, most hotels only have a few single rooms, so many times they provide what they term "double for single use". They do, however, charge a premium for the luxury of staying alone. I am faced with this all the time. If you cannot find a partner, I will be glad to match up single travelers if possible. Otherwise, the single supplement for this tour is **\$400.00** extra per person.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS:

Prepare for a physically demanding tour. Age is not a concern so long as you are physically fit, a very good walker at an energetic pace, and able to stand for extended periods of time and climb lots of hills and stairs. All the above could be done in all sorts of weather and temperatures. You are required to load and unload your bags into the van, and to carry your bag to your room. This sometimes could be a short distance from the hotel. Most days our sightseeing will cover anywhere from 2-8 miles of walking, sometimes over uneven surfaces. Plan to get in shape before you head to Italy.