

ITALY – PUGLIA & THE SOUTH, ITALY'S BEST KEPT SECRET

8-days / 7-nights one-hotel guided walks & sightseeing from Altamura in the undiscovered south of Italy



This walking and sightseeing holiday explores Italy's best-kept secret, the rural region of Puglia, near the 'heel' in the south of the country. Fringed by the azure Ionian and Adriatic seas, the gentle rolling countryside offers wide-ranging views across the plains to snow-capped mountains. Walks in Puglia follow the trails of the Templars on ancient routes through wheat fields and groves of olive, almond and cherry trees. Discover Alta Murgia National Park, rich in birdlife and flora, and dotted with ancient villages steeped in history and year-round sunshine. Nearby in Basilicata is the truly impressive sight of Matera – *voted European Capital of Culture 2019* – a crevasse of hundreds of cave dwellings believed to be the World's oldest inhabited human settlement.

The rural charm and traditional cuisine of Puglia, the bread basket of Italy, is amply displayed in its quaint trattorias and cafés. We stay in a restored *palazzo* in the historic town of Altamura, with its Romanesque-Gothic cathedral and distinctive cobblestone alleyways or *claustri* which often end in small courtyards.

This is an ideal holiday for those who are interested in archaeology and the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras of human history. We explore the ancient cave dwellings in the cliffs of the *Pulo* of Alta Murgia National Park, and learn about the long history of the *sassi* of Matera. Close by our base in Altamura are renowned fossil sites with dinosaur footprints and the Palaeolithic 'Altamura Man' embedded in limestone.

On a typical centre-based holiday there is a choice of guided walks each day. You choose the option which best suits your interests and fitness, easier or more challenging. As your holiday progresses you may feel confident to try a more challenging level, or stick to the same level - it's your choice.

Cost from: **\$2880** per person (twin share) Single room supplement from \$330

Departs: 23rd, 30th April; 7th, 14th, 21st May; 10th, 17th, 24th September; 1st, 8th October, 2022

Tour includes: 7 nights in a comfortable hotel room with ensuite bathroom, 7 breakfasts, 7 evening meals, experienced walks leader, local transport to/from the walks.

Not Included: Meals and drinks not mentioned, any personal expenses, excursions on your free day, Airport transfers from/to Bari at set times can be pre-booked at extra cost – we recommend you take these - please ask for details when booking.

Meals in Altamura: We serve continental breakfast at the hotel and dinner at local restaurants with local specialities, including the *Pane di Altamura* and *Focaccia di Altamura* (local milled bread topped with tomatoes and herbs). The cuisine is rural and rustic and cooking methods simple and traditional. Puglia's native vines include *Negroamaro* (robust reds and fragrant rosés), and *Primitivo* (also known as Zinfandel) full-bodied reds.

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Accommodation: Our charming 4-star hotel dates back to 1741 when it was a *palazzo* of local nobility. It has been beautifully restored and is located in the centre of the picturesque old town of Altamura. It offers our guests traditional Italian hospitality. Guests take continental breakfast in the splendid, vaulted 19th Century 'Caravaggio' dining room. The historic town of Altamura is on the doorstep with easy access to its shops and attractions.

Footpath and walking information



Easier Walks: 8-11km on a mixture of good paths and tracks. With up to 370m of ascent in a day.



Harder Walks: 10 -18km on paths & tracks, some rocky sections. With up to 430m of ascent in a day.

Suggested itinerary: *Walking program is subject to change and daily walk selections are made by walk leaders.*

Day 1 Arrival day: Plan to arrive at the hotel in Altamura mid-afternoon. Transfers at set times from Bari Airport, about an hour away, are available at extra cost - ask us for details.

Day 2 Alta Murgia and the *Pulo*: We explore Alta Murgia National Park, near where prehistoric 'Altamura Man' was discovered. The *Pulo* is a doline, resembling a crater in the limestone, probably caused by a sinkhole collapsing, and its cliffs are lined with ancient cave dwellings. We have an opportunity to explore the ravines and caves of the doline. The area is a haven for wildlife and wildflowers, butterflies, orchid, crocus and cyclamen.

Day 3 Matera and the *Sassi*: We visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Matera, in the neighbouring region of Basilicata, where the cave districts or *sassi* have been inhabited for centuries. At the visitor centre outside town we walk through the limestone scenery on the north side of the deep Matera Gorge, enjoying views across the gorge to the city. We visit rock churches and troglodyte houses, accompanied by an expert local guide.

Day 4 Castel del Monte: Crossing Alta Murgia National Park by coach we start east of the castle and wander through olive groves and villages, past typical *trulli* houses, distinctive white-washed dry-stone structures with conical limestone roofs. The 13th Century Castel del Monte was built by Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II.

Day 5 Free day: No walks are planned for today. Relax at the hotel or sip a coffee in Altamura's narrow streets. Make an excursion to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Alberobello, with its many famous *trulli* houses, or to Bari, with its mazelike old town, the Romanesque Basilica of Saint Nicholas, and the ancient market place.

Day 6 Archaeological sites near Gravina: We start in the walled town of Gravina. Crossing an ancient aqueduct we ascend to an Iron Age hill fort and a plateau strewn with archaeological sites (some occupied from the 5th Century BC). We explore the *sotterranea*, a maze of underground tunnels, churches and cellars.

Day 7 Mercadante Forest: Wander through the Mercadante Forest, a woodland of Aleppo pines, cypresses, holm oaks and oaks, then onto open heath, where we can stop at a *jazzo*, built as a temporary pen for sheep or livestock in transhumance. We circle back into the forest and end at a *taverna* for refreshment to end the walk.

Day 8 Departure day: Tour ends after breakfast (set transfer to Bari Airport available at extra cost).

Outdoor Travel offer guided centre-based or self-guided inn-to-inn walking holidays in many other areas of Italy including the **Cinque Terre, Tuscany, Umbria, and Amalfi Coast**, as well as other parts of Europe. **Outdoor Travel** also offer great pilgrimage routes such as the **Way of St James** or Camino de Santiago from Le Puy in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain or the pilgrims' road to Rome, the **Via Francigena** in Italy.

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- Call Toll free 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright, VIC 3741, Australia



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