

ITALY Journey through Puglia

Italy's southeastern region of Puglia has been seducing travellers for centuries. Whether it's by two wheels or two feet, here are six ways to journey through the heel of Italy. Words: Daniel James Clarke

Travellers come from far and wide to journey through Puglia and soak up the region's beauty and culture. With an expansive collection of biking trails and *cammini* (walking paths) crisscrossing Puglia's six provinces, the region is rich in routes to discover.

CICLOVIA DELL'OFANTO FOR BIKERS AFTER ADVENTURES

Puglia's province of Barletta-Andria-Trani is home to the Ciclovia dell'Ofanto. Covering 93 miles, the demanding trail descends from the medieval hamlet of Rocchetta Sant'Antonio in the Daunian Mountains to the Ofanto River Valley, ending at the Margherita di Savoia salt flats. You can find respite at agriturismos (farm-style accommodation) and vineyards producing Nero di Troia, while the Canne della Battaglia archaeological park — the site of a famous battle between the Romans and the Carthaginians — is well worth a visit.

VIA MICAELICA FOR HISTORY ON FOOT

Follow in the footsteps of countless pilgrims across the five sections of the Via Micaelica (Via Francigena del Gargano). Weaving through the province of Foggia, this 68-mile medium-difficulty trail is an offshoot of the famed Via Francigena, which once linked Rome to Canterbury. Peppered with holy sites, the journey from the hilltop town of Troia to the Gargano Peninsula reaches its grand finale at the sacred cave church of San Michele di Monte Sant'Angelo.

ANELLO DEL SALENTO FOR COASTAL CYCLES

Savour all three of the Salento peninsula's provinces (Lecce and parts of Brindisi and Taranto) on this easy but often road-sharing 210-mile circular route. Beginning in the grand city of Lecce, beloved for its limestone-crafted baroque architecture, the

full circuit takes in Torre dell'Orso beach, with its cliffs and bath-like waters, and charming seaside towns such as Leuca and Gallipoli. This bike ride is the perfect route for those seeking authentic local fuel, such as pizza-dough *puccia* sandwiches, clay-pot octopus and maritati pasta with ricotta.

VIA PEUCETA FOR LEISURELY AMBLES

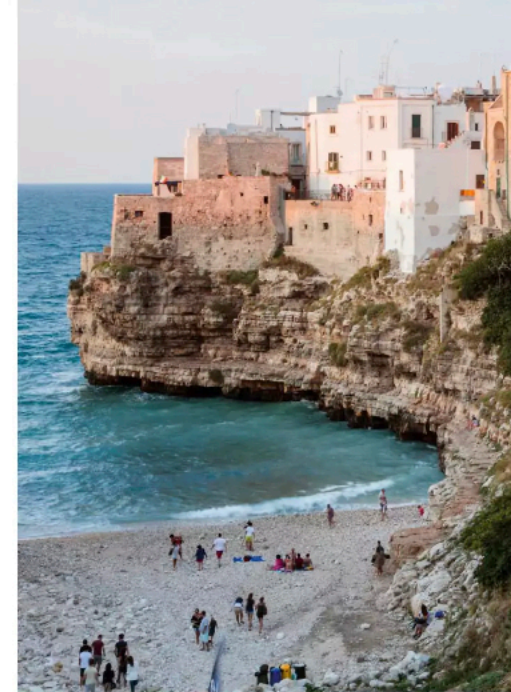
Leaving Bari's coast behind, the Via Peuceta presents history-seekers with mostly easy strolls in the hinterland. From abundant olive groves to the hauntingly barren karst plateau of the Murgia sub-region, the limelight is as much on the changing landscapes as the province's relics. Medieval *borghi* (small villages), long-abandoned *trulli* (dry stone huts with conical roofs), the neolithic site of Norman and Balsignano cathedrals whisper their stories, while the cave dwellings of Sassi di Matera in Basilicata await at the end of the long trail.

VIA ELLENICA FOR VIEWS & HERITAGE SITES

You'll find two contrasting trails on the Via Ellenica, thanks to its twin walking route offering. The first half links Brindisi to Martina Franca, stopping at some of Puglia's most beautiful towns, including whitewashed Ostuni and Alberobello, UNESCO-listed for its extensive cluster of *trulli*. But it's the second 93-mile stretch, which crosses the province of Taranto, that provides the impressive landscapes.

CICLOVIA DELL'ACQUEDOTTO PUGLIESE FOR A SERENE TWO-WHEEL TASTER

Cyclists seeking an easy-going route will relish the Ciclovia dell'Acquedotto. Connecting Cisternino to Ceglie Messapica in Brindisi, this flat trail is anchored around a 19th-century aqueduct, which was an engineering marvel of its time. The 10-mile route tracks the main canal's service road through the olive grove-coated Valle d'Itria.



Clockwise from left: cyclists ride past traditional *trulli* houses in Alberobello, Puglia, Italy; Polignano a Mare, Apulia, Italy; Puccia (a sandwich made of pizza dough)

PLAN YOUR TRIP

There are regular direct flights to Bari and Brindisi from Stansted. Seasonal Gatwick flights are also available. Visit weareinpuglia.it #weareinPUGLIA

