



Gastronomic Puglia

'L'orto d'Italia': food & wine in the vegetable garden of Italy

10–16 October 2024 (MK 545)

7 days • £3,410

Lecturer: Christine Smallwood

The 'heel' of Italy is one of Europe's most bountiful agricultural areas.

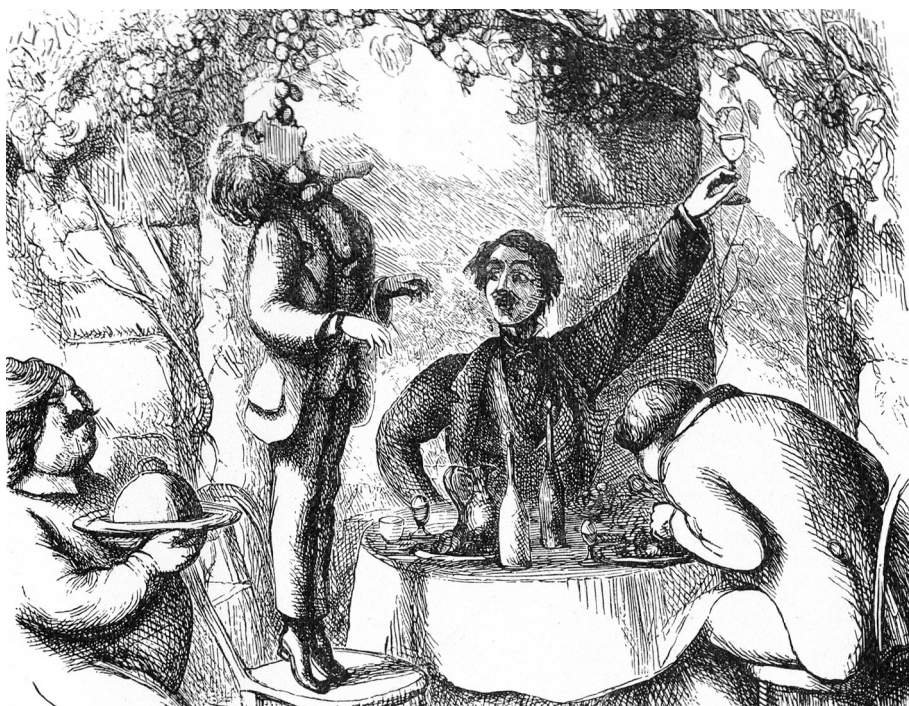
The staples of Italian cuisine – bread, pasta, oil and cheese – in their primitive perfection.

A spectrum of traditions from the family-run *trattoria* to the Michelin-starred restaurant.

The Pugliesi don't just want you to eat their food, they want you to savour their *territorio*; and they produce a lot to savour. The long, southern region known as *l'orto d'Italia* (the vegetable garden of Italy) is predominantly level; and blessed with fertile soil and a benign climate of mild winters and long, hot summers. Vast acreage is used for the cultivation of grains and the brilliant sun gives an intense flavour and fragrance to the profusion of fruit and vegetables. Readily available flat land facilitates grazing and animal husbandry, with excellent cheese-making. The long coastline provides abundant fish and shellfish, and Puglia proudly produces more olive oil than any other Italian region, using it generously. Many consider the food here to be a prime example of the Mediterranean diet.

Most of the region faces east across the Adriatic, a gateway to eastern Europe, Greece, Croatia, Albania and Turkey. It is where Greek influence is felt most strongly in Italy, from the indigenous grape – Nero di Troia – to the fish soups that recall Hellenistic recipes. The influence of Frederick II, the extraordinary emperor of the Hohenstaufen dynasty that ruled the region from 1194, persists in and beyond the kitchen: his Castel del Monte is a striking physical reference point and in its environs we visit an outstading olive oil and wine producer and a chef with an extraordinary kitchen garden. We see the celebrated loaves of Altamura being made (some of the best bakers in Italy are of Puglian descent), visit a traditional *salumi* producer and explore the culinary culture with the help of copious and renowned *antipasti*.

Wines range from pale (Locorotondo white), through the best *rosato* in Italy, to the deepest, darkest fullest reds of the more internationally celebrated Primitivo and Negroamaro grapes. Also sample lesser-known indigenous varieties, such as the sweet Moscato di Trani.



From 'The Foreign Tour of Messrs Brown, Jones & Robinson' by Richard Doyle, Publ. 1854.

We have selected authentic establishments where the warmth of welcome and genuine readiness to please is as much a part of the experience as the appetising food and wine. The Milanese have been quietly relishing Puglia for a long time, and although the famous *burrata* cheese is now shipped around the world daily, there is nothing like eating it fresh from the maker. In fact, there is nothing like eating in Puglia, undoubtedly one of the most colourful, generous and exuberant of all regional Italian kitchens.

Itinerary

Day 1: Trani. Fly at c. 6.45am from London Heathrow to Bari, via Milan. Drive to the small city of Monopoli, stopping at a charming winery on the way. First of three nights in a converted *masseria* in Monopoli.

Day 2: Monopoli, near Alberobello, Ceglie Messapica. A short introductory walk around Monopoli, taking in the fish market, precedes a visit to an award-winning *oleificio* near Alberobello to learn the little-known art of tasting olive oil. Ceglie Messapica is a delightful town containing a Norman castle and several churches. It has made a name for itself in recent

years as a centre of gastronomy, relying on the produce of the local area where agriculture is the largest employer. Lunch is at an outstanding restaurant. Discover *biscotti ceglieesi*, local biscuits made from almonds and cherry jam.

Day 3: Cisternino, Martina Franca, Conversano. The gastronomic speciality of Martina Franca is *capocollo*, a cold cut marinated in spiced red wine and smoked with oak and almond husk. Visit a family-run producer and taste the meat with wine. Continue through the Itria Valley to Martina Franca, a beautiful hill town of winding streets, sudden vistas and Baroque and Rococo houses and churches. Dinner is at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Carovigno.

Day 4: Altamura, near Monopoli. Visit Altamura, for lunch in a traditional restaurant where you can try making and then taste *orecchiette*, a typical pasta shape. Visit a bakery that produces Altamura's unique bread. Continue to Trani, where the following three nights are spent in a converted 15th-century convent.

Day 5: Trani, near Andria. A walk along the harbour includes the 12th-century church of Ognissanti and the magically beautiful

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continued

Romanesque cathedral perched on the waterfront. Drive to the countryside near Andria to visit a family-run wine and olive oil producer, dating back to the 17th century. Visit the vineyards, the farm and the *cantina*, as well as the wine cellars in the castle where the family still lives. There is a wine tasting and a simple but plentiful lunch of fresh produce from the farm.

Day 6: Andria, Montegrosso. Nearby Andria is the home of *burrata*, the now world-famous *mozzarella* stuffed with *stracciatella* – an oozing mixture of cream and *mozzarella* scraps. Visit an artisan producer, where there is the opportunity to try your hand at making it. Also in Andria is the Museo del Confetto (sugared almonds). Continue to the small town of Montegrosso for lunch at an exceptional restaurant with a vast kitchen garden. The self-styled ‘*chef-contadino*’ (farmer chef) gives a guided tour of his extensive *orto* – a fitting introduction to one of the best lunches in Puglia. Conclude the day with a wine tasting given by the lecturer.

Day 7: Trani. Visit a producer of Moscato di Trani, a sweet wine whose history dates back to the 13th century, when the merchants of the Republic of Venice made it famous throughout much of Europe. Continue to Bari and fly to London Heathrow, via Milan, arriving c. 8.45pm.

Lecturer

Christine Smallwood. Food and travel writer specializing in Italy, and is the author of a series of books, including *An Appetite for Puglia: the people, the places, the food*. A French graduate and Committee Member of the Guild of Food Writers, Christine was appointed the international curator of a food festival in Puglia for three years. She was awarded the Crest of Puglia by the President of the region in March 2008 in recognition of her knowledge and communication of its gastronomic culture.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £3,410 or £3,170 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,890 or £3,650 without flights.

Included: flights (Economy class) on scheduled ITA flights (Airbus 319, Embraer 90); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, **4 lunches and 4 dinners** with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Il Melograno, near Monopoli (melograno.com): very comfortable 5-star hotel in a converted *masseria*, in the countryside near Monopoli. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use throughout.*
Hotel San Paolo al Convento, Trani (hotelsanpaoloalconventotrani.it): a charming 4-star hotel converted from a 15th-century convent, in the centre of town.

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking, some of it over rough ground and cobbled or uneven paving. Fitness and sure-footedness are essential. The tour should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. There is a lot of driving on this tour; Puglia is a very long region and we have decided to keep hotel changes to a minimum. The coach often cannot reach town centres. Average distance by coach per day: 77 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.