

ITALY'S ABRUZZO & PUGLIA

From the Apennines to the Adriatic

15 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Rome

Welcome to Rome, the "Eternal City."

Our aim during our time in this incredible city, is to step off the beaten path and discover a side of Rome that few tourists ever see. Over the next two days, we'll venture beyond the Colosseum and Trevi Fountain, exploring hidden gems and lesser-known neighbourhoods. From the vibrant atmosphere of Trastevere to panoramic views from Gianicolo Hill, we'll immerse ourselves in the city's authentic charm.

If this is your first visit to Rome, you may consider adding an extra night or two and experiencing some of the iconic sites on your own. Our hotel will likely be located in the Central Station area of Rome; while it's not the most picturesque or historical part of the city, it's well-connected to other areas of Rome via public transport and easy to get to from Rome's international airport.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Underground Rome & Trastevere

Today we embark on a journey through the hidden and historic parts of Rome. Our day begins with a private guided visit to the ancient Catacombs of San Callisto or Priscilla. As we wander through the labyrinthine tunnels, we marvel at the intricate frescoes and the profound silence that envelopes these sacred burial sites. The guide's tales of early Christian martyrs and the history etched into the walls bring the past vividly to life.

After our underground exploration, we head to Trastevere for a break for lunch (on your own account). You have the freedom to meander through its charming, cobblestone streets, discovering cozy cafes and bustling markets along the way. The district is a vibrant tapestry of local life, where every corner offers a new delight – from aromatic street food to the melodies of street performers.

In the afternoon, we visit the stunning Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere. This historic church, with its glittering mosaics and serene atmosphere, invites us to pause and reflect. From there, we make our way to Gianicolo Hill. As we ascend, the city unfolds below us, offering breathtaking panoramic views of Rome. The sight is a testament to the city's timeless beauty, with its domes and ancient structures bathed in the golden afternoon light.

Our day concludes with a dinner at a traditional trattoria, where we savour authentic Roman dishes crafted with love and tradition. The warm, inviting atmosphere of the trattoria, paired with the rich flavours of the cuisine, provides a perfect end to our day of exploration.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Ancient Baths & Local Markets

Today we begin our adventure with a visit to the awe-inspiring Baths of Caracalla. As we step into this ancient Roman bathing complex, we are immediately transported back in time. The grandeur of the colossal ruins, the intricate mosaics underfoot, and the remnants of the once bustling social hub tell tales of opulence and public life in ancient Rome. Wandering through these majestic halls, we can almost hear the echoes of conversations and splashes of water from centuries past.

From the ancient baths, we transition to a culinary tour at a local market. The market is a feast for the senses, with vibrant stalls brimming with fresh produce, aromatic herbs, and delectable local delicacies. We engage with friendly vendors, taste samples of regional specialties, and perhaps even pick up a few ingredients to savour later. The bustling atmosphere, the colourful displays, and the mouth-watering aromas make this a delightful and immersive experience.

Our afternoon takes us to the charming Monti district. Here we explore its hidden courtyards, quaint streets, and intriguing art galleries. Monti is a haven for artists and creatives, and as we stroll through its picturesque alleys, we discover unique boutiques, artisanal shops, and perhaps stumble upon a hidden gem of an art gallery. Each corner of Monti offers a new surprise, blending history with a contemporary, bohemian vibe.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Rome - Sulmona: Town Touring

Today we set off on a picturesque journey from Rome to Sulmona. Our morning drive takes us through the breathtaking Apennines, a mountain range that showcases the rugged beauty of central Italy. The winding roads offer stunning vistas of lush valleys, charming hilltop villages, and serene landscapes that make the drive an experience in itself.

Upon arriving in Sulmona, we embark on a guided exploration of this historic town. Our first stop is the Confetti Museum, where we delve into the world of Sulmona's famous sugared almonds. The museum offers a fascinating look at the history and craftsmanship behind these delightful confections, from their origins to their role in Italian celebrations. We might even get to taste some freshly made confetti, adding a sweet touch to our visit.

Next, we head to the Archaeological Museum, where we uncover the ancient history of Sulmona and the surrounding region. The museum's exhibits feature a rich collection of artifacts, from Roman relics to medieval treasures, each telling a story of the town's storied past. As we wander through the exhibits, we gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural heritage that has shaped Sulmona over the centuries.

As evening falls, we look forward to a dinner featuring Abruzzese specialties. The local cuisine is a celebration of hearty flavours and traditional recipes, with dishes that reflect the region's rustic charm and culinary prowess.

Our day concludes with an overnight stay in Sulmona. At some point during our day, your Tour Leader will prompt you to acquire some picnic lunch items for tomorrow's hike.

Overnight in Sulmona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Sulmona: Hiking & Wine Tasting

Today we embrace the beauty of nature and the flavours of the land, beginning with a guided hike on the picturesque Passo delle Forche trail, nestled in the picturesque countryside near Sulmona.* As we set out, the trail unwinds before us through a diverse landscape of lush forests, gentle slopes, and alongside the soothing sounds of babbling streams.

The terrain is generally moderate, with some uneven terrain and occasional inclines, but the pace is relaxed, allowing us to take in the sights and sounds of the natural surroundings. Our guide will share stories about the local flora, fauna, and history, adding depth and context to our hike.

As we walk, the forest canopy overhead provides dappled shade, while the scent of wild herbs and trees fills the air. The trail occasionally opens up to reveal panoramic views of the surrounding countryside, with the Apennine Mountains rising up in the distance. We'll take breaks along the way to rest and refuel, enjoying a picnic lunch amidst the tranquil surroundings.

After our hike, we indulge in an afternoon of wine tasting at a nearby winery. Nestled in the heart of Abruzzo, this region is renowned for its exquisite wines that reflect the unique terroir of the region. We tour the vineyard, learning about the meticulous process of winemaking, from grape cultivation to bottling. The highlight of our visit is, of course, the tasting. As we sample a selection the finest wines, savouring the rich flavours and subtle aromas that characterize each variety.

As evening approaches, we look forward to a dinner at a local trattoria. The menu features a range of traditional dishes, showcasing the rich culinary heritage of the region.

* ACTIVITY SUMMARY: Distance approximately 5 to 7 km (3-4.5 mi), 2-3 hours at a leisurely pace. The terrain is generally moderate, with

some uneven terrain and occasional inclines, but the pace is relaxed, allowing us to take in the sights and sounds of the natural surroundings.

Overnight in Sulmona.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Sulmona - Vasto via a Hike/Walk at Punta Aderci

This morning we begin our transfer to Vasto, a journey that promises scenic views. Vasto is a lovely hilltop town overlooking the Adriatic sea in southern Abruzzo. It has a lovely medieval centre and many beautiful buildings dating from the 15th century. The first thing you will appreciate on arriving in Vasto are the beautiful panoramic views over the Adriatic sea, over the lovely golden beaches and towards the Punta della Penne harbour and lighthouse.

Above the sea, on a hillside, Vasto has a charming medieval old centre with its marvellous Piazza Rossetti with the impressive Caldorecco Castle. The original parts of the castle date back to the 14th and 15th centuries.

Upon arrival, we head straight to the Punta Aderci Nature Reserve for a guided walk.* The reserve is a haven of natural beauty, with its diverse flora and fauna, rugged coastline, and sweeping vistas of the Adriatic Sea. Our guide shares insights about the local ecosystem and the conservation efforts in place, making this walk both informative and enriching.

In the afternoon, we explore the "trabocchi," traditional fishing platforms unique to this region. These wooden structures, extending over the water, offer a glimpse into the age-old fishing practices of the Adriatic coast. We learn about their construction, the history behind them, and perhaps even witness some local fishermen at work. The sight of these platforms against the backdrop of the azure sea is iconic of the region.

This evening we savour the local cuisine, featuring traditional dishes that showcase the culinary heritage of Vasto.

ACTIVITY SUMMARY: The duration/length of our walk may vary depending on variables such as weather and group interest, but we expect to be on our feet for approximately 2.5 hours. As this is a coast walk, expect mostly flat/mildly undulating terrain.

Overnight in Vasto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Vasto: Cooking Class & Historic Centre

Today we delve into the heart of Abruzzese culture, starting with a cooking class in the serene countryside.* In the morning, we'll be introduced to the art of making traditional pasta and sauces. Under the guidance of a local chef, we learn the secrets of Abruzzese cuisine, kneading dough and blending ingredients to create delicious, authentic dishes. The hands-on experience is both educational and enjoyable, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the region's culinary traditions.

For lunch, we have the pleasure of enjoying the fruits of our labour. The dishes we prepared during the class are served, and we savour each bite, appreciating the fresh, local flavours. The meal is a celebration of our newfound skills and the rich culinary heritage of Abruzzo.

In the afternoon, we head back to Vasto to explore its historic centre with a local guide. Our first stop is the Loggia Amblinigh, a scenic walkway that offers stunning views of the Adriatic Sea and the coastline below. As we stroll along the loggia, we take in the picturesque panorama, with the sea stretching out to the horizon.

From there, we delve into Vasto's medieval centre. The cobblestone streets are lined with historic buildings, and each corner reveals a piece of the town's past. We explore ancient churches, visit the Palazzo d'Avalos, and uncover the stories that have shaped Vasto over the centuries. The town's rich history is evident in its well-preserved architecture and the vibrant life that continues to thrive in its ancient alleys.

Due to the size of our lunch, we leave this evening's meal to your own account.

* Please note that this activity may occur elsewhere in our program.

Overnight in Vasto.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 8 Vasto to L'Aquila via Santo Stefano di Sessanio

This morning we set off for L'Aquila, embarking on a scenic journey through the heart of Abruzzo. Our first stop is the attractive village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio. Nestled in the Gran Sasso mountains, this medieval hilltop village is a step back in time. We wander through its narrow, cobblestone streets, admiring the ancient stone houses and the tranquil atmosphere. The village, with its timeless charm and panoramic views, offers a perfect blend of history and natural beauty.

Continuing our journey, we arrive in L'Aquila in the afternoon and have a guided tour on arrival. L'Aquila is a fascinating city with a rich history and vibrant culture. The city was founded in the 13th century by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II and quickly became an important cultural and economic center.

Our first visit is the Basilica di Santa Maria di Collemaggio, an architectural gem that stands as a testament to the city's rich history. The basilica, with its striking pink-and-white facade and intricate rose window, is a masterpiece of Romanesque and Gothic styles. Inside, we explore its beautifully restored interiors, learning about its significance and the efforts to preserve its legacy following the 2009 earthquake.

As evening approaches, we look forward to a traditional dinner in L'Aquila. The local cuisine is known for its robust flavours and hearty dishes.

NOTE: Your Tour Leader will remind you of our planned hike tomorrow and for the need to acquire/prepare items for a picnic lunch to bring with you.

Overnight in L'Aquila.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 From L'Aquila: Gran Sasso National Park Hike to Rocca Calascio

Today we embark on a guided hike in Gran Sasso National Park, heading towards the historic Rocca Calascio. Known for its stunning panoramic views and the opportunity to explore a medieval castle, this hike promises a blend of natural beauty and historical intrigue.

We have two potential starting points for our hike, the first option being the village of Calascio. This route covers approximately 2.9 kilometres (1.8 miles) roundtrip and takes around 1.5 hours to complete. It's a manageable hike, suitable for most fitness levels, offering an easy to moderate challenge as we ascend to the castle.

If the group's ability allows, we may begin from Santo Stefano di Sessanio. This path is slightly longer, spanning approximately 4.6 kilometres (2.8 miles) roundtrip. Depending on our pace and the time spent enjoying the views, this hike takes about 2 to 3 hours to complete. The journey from Santo Stefano di Sessanio is particularly scenic, winding through lush landscapes and offering ample opportunities to appreciate the serene beauty of the Itria Valley.

As we hike towards Rocca Calascio, the trail reveals breathtaking vistas of the Gran Sasso massif and the surrounding countryside. The crisp mountain air and the sounds of nature enhance our experience, providing a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Along the way, we may spot various flora and fauna.

Upon reaching Rocca Calascio, the ruins of the medieval castle stand majestically atop a ridge, offering commanding views of the entire valley. Built in the 10th century, this castle is one of the highest fortresses in Italy and has featured in the film "The Name of the Rose." We take our time to explore the ancient stone structures, absorbing the historical significance and the spectacular scenery.

After thoroughly exploring Rocca Calascio, we take a moment to rest and enjoy a picnic with the panoramic views as our backdrop. We then descend via the same scenic path, returning to L'Aquila for dinner and overnight.

Overnight in L'Aquila.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Canada/USA
1-800-665-3998

Email
sales@adventures-abroad.com

Day 10 L'Aquila, Abruzzo - Matera, Basilicata

We'll get an early start today as we embark on a scenic road journey (the longest of our tour) from L'Aquila to Matera (+/- 4.5 hours with rest stop/s), a route that takes us through some of Italy's most captivating landscapes. As we leave L'Aquila, descend through verdant valleys and rolling hills. Travelling southeast, we pass by charming hilltop villages and expansive farmlands; the road winds through small towns, offering glimpses of daily life and the region's rich cultural heritage.

As we arrive in Matera, a captivating city nestled in the region of Basilicata. Boasting a history that stretches back over 9,000 years, Matera is one of the oldest continuously inhabited settlements on Earth. Its most iconic feature is the Sassi, a network of ancient cave dwellings carved into the soft tufa rock. For centuries, these unique homes provided shelter for generations of Materans, offering a glimpse into a bygone era. While once considered a symbol of poverty and deprivation, the Sassi have undergone a remarkable transformation, now recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

After some time for lunch and time-permitting, we may begin our Matera sightseeing with an informal orientation before enjoying a break before dinner. Basilicata is known for its simple, flavourful dishes often prepared with fresh, locally sourced ingredients.

Overnight in Matera.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Matera Touring & Time at Leisure

This morning we'll delve deeper into Matera's ancient heart, visiting one of its remarkable rock-hewn churches. Whether we choose the serene Church of Saint Mary of Idris or the historic Church of Saint Peter Caveoso, we'll be treated to stunning frescoes that adorn the walls. As we step inside, the cool, dim light creates a sense of awe, and the intricate artwork transports us back in time.

Next, we'll wander through the historic Sasso Caveoso district, one of the two main sections of the Sassi. This neighbourhood, with its steep, narrow streets and cave dwellings, is a fascinating place to explore. As we stroll through the winding alleyways, we'll feel like we're stepping back in time.

After our morning adventure, you'll have the rest of the day to explore Matera at your own pace. Perhaps wander through the winding streets, admiring local artisans' work, or sampling the region's delicious cuisine. Or just simply relax in a cozy café, soaking up the unique atmosphere of this ancient city.

Overnight in Matera.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Matera - Alberobello, Puglia

Leaving Matera behind, we set off on a picturesque drive to the charming Puglian town of Alberobello, a town renowned for its unique Trulli houses. These whitewashed stone buildings, topped with conical roofs, create a fairy-tale-like atmosphere and are a UNESCO World Heritage site. The scenic journey takes us through the beautiful landscapes of Puglia (Apulia), with rolling hills, olive groves, and vineyards stretching as far as the eye can see.

Upon arriving in Alberobello, we immerse ourselves in the town's unique atmosphere with a local guide. Our exploration begins in the Rione Monti and Rione Aia Piccola districts, where the highest concentration of Trulli can be found. As we wander through the narrow, winding streets, each turn reveals another cluster of these charming houses, adorned with ancient symbols painted on their roofs. We'll visit the Trullo Sovrano, the largest and most impressive Trullo in Alberobello. This two-story Trullo, built in the 18th century, offers a fascinating glimpse into the region's architectural history. We'll learn about the construction techniques and cultural significance of these iconic structures, gaining a deeper appreciation for the ingenuity and heritage of Alberobello.

You'll have some time to wander on your own before we reconvene for dinner. Puglian cuisine is rooted in tradition -- fresh pasta, such as orecchiette, is a staple, often served with simple sauces like tomato and basil.

Overnight in Alberobello.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 From Alberobello: Locorotondo & Hiking in the Itria Valley

This morning's activity is some leisurely walking/exploring in the picturesque Itria Valley, a region in Puglia known for its charming towns, ancient olive groves, and traditional trulli.* While the valley's agricultural landscape may not offer traditional hiking trails, it's perfect for a relaxing countryside stroll.

We'll explore the rolling hills, olive groves, and dry stone walls that characterize this beautiful region. Our suggested route takes us on a circular walk around the charming town of Locorotondo, famous for its whitewashed houses and unique circular layout. Starting from the town center, we'll make our way through the outskirts and into the surrounding olive groves. As we wander along the winding paths, we'll take in the peaceful scenery and perhaps stop to admire the views or take a few photos. After exploring the countryside, we'll return to Locorotondo via a different route, passing through some of the town's picturesque vineyards.

As referenced above, the Itria Valley is renowned for its olive oil production, and visiting a local masseria (farmhouse) is a great way to experience the region's rural traditions. We'll participate in a guided tour and tasting of olive oil and local products. During our visit, we'll learn about the traditional farming methods used in the masseria, as well as the production process of their olive oil.

* ACTIVITY SUMMARY: Our moderate hike typically covers 4-6 km (3-4 mi) and will take around 2-4 hours to complete.

Overnight in Alberobello

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Alberobello - Polignano a Mare - Bari

After bidding farewell to Alberobello and its iconic trulli, we'll embark on a scenic drive towards the coastal town of Polignano a Mare. The journey itself is a pleasure, winding through the picturesque Puglian countryside.

Polignano a Mare, a historic gem, is perched on a dramatic cliff overlooking the Adriatic Sea. We can wander through the narrow, winding streets of the old town, admiring the colourful houses clinging to the cliff edge. The town's ancient origins can be traced back to the Neolithic period, and its rich history is evident in its architecture and cultural heritage.

One of the highlights of our visit is a stroll along the waterfront, taking in the stunning views of the crystal-clear waters below. You'll have time to explore on your own, grab a coffee and/or a snack, before we continue our journey towards Bari, the last overnight stop on our journey. As we drive along the coast, we'll be treated to breathtaking views of the sea and the charming coastal towns that dot the shoreline.

As we approach Bari, the landscape transitions from rural to urban, with the bustling energy of the port city becoming evident. Bari, the capital of the Puglia region, welcomes us with its vibrant atmosphere and rich history. Bari is a city where history and modernity coexist harmoniously.

After settling in, your Tour Leader will suggest an informal exploration of Bari Vecchia, the historic centre. The narrow alleyways, with their labyrinthine charm, are filled with charming shops and lively markets. Bari Vecchia is also home to the iconic Basilica di San Nicola, an architectural marvel and a significant pilgrimage site. This basilica, with its striking Romanesque architecture, houses the relics of Saint Nicholas and is a place of deep religious and cultural significance.

Take time to wander through the old town, soak in the vibrant local life. Bari's blend of ancient charm and contemporary vibrancy makes it the perfect way to end our sojourn with a farewell dinner and overnight.

Overnight in Bari.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

Departure from Bari - thank you for joining us!

Buon viaggio!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast