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APULIA BY SCOOTER

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APULIA BY SCOOTER

RIDING DAY 1 : MOLFETTA - MATERA

Standard Route (155 km / 96 miles)

First thing in the morning, we leave the densely populated coast behind us and head inland, where one of the most famous sights in southern Italy awaits us. Castel del Monte, which is around 800 years old, is shrouded in mystery and extremely photogenic.

Around noon, we reach Gravina in Puglia, a medieval town that Daniel Craig made famous worldwide as James Bond in his last appearance. Unlike James, we treat ourselves to a relaxed lunch here before continuing further south. A winding little road runs along the shore of Lago di San Giuliano, leading us to a unique cave church. Our destination for the day is the city of Matera, famous for its numerous cave dwellings. We will spend two nights here.

Highlights:

#1: Castel del Monte



Castel del Monte is the most enigmatic building of all the castles and fortresses that Frederick II, the Staufer, had built along a defensive line in Basilicata, but especially in Puglia, around 1240. Comparisons are always made to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The octagonal, the presence of the numbers eight, five and three within the architectural concept allows connections to astrology and

number mysticism. In addition, Castel del Monte is said to be located exactly in the geographical center between the Cheops Pyramid and Chartres Cathedral, and would fit right in with the Cheops Pyramid. What messages does the building hide? What purpose was it intended to serve? In 1656, the Carafa, an important noble family, fled from the plague to the castle for half a year. After that, it fell into disrepair, was plundered and served as a shelter for shepherds. In 1876 the Italian state bought the Castel and had it restored in 1928. It has been on UNESCO's World Heritage List since 1996 and has graced the reverse of the Italian 1 cent coin since the introduction of the euro in 2002.

#2: Cripta del Peccato Originale (Crypt of Original Sin)



The Crypt of Original Sin was the place of worship of a Benedictine monastery dating back to the Lombard period. It is decorated with a cycle of frescoes from the 8th and 9th centuries, painted by the so-called Flower Painter of Matera, which express the historical characteristics of Benedictine-Beneventan art. The left wall is interrupted by three niches, each depicting the Trinity of the Apostles, the

Virgin and Queen, and the Archangels. The back wall, on the other hand, is enlivened by a large cycle of paintings depicting episodes from the Creation and Original Sin.



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RIDING DAY 2 : MATERA

Standard Route (113 km / 70 miles)

Matera is a city where you can easily spend a whole day. The labyrinth of alleys and small squares is full of surprises. The cave dwellings and churches are unique! James Bond fans can hunt for film locations from “No Time to Die.”

Of course, we still want to take our scooters for a spin, as there is also plenty to see in the surrounding area. First, we ride to a viewpoint from which you can enjoy a spectacular view of the city. Then a narrow road takes us through the flat countryside to Gioia del Colle, where we can marvel at an 800-year-old Norman-Swabian castle. It dates back to the Staufer Emperor Frederick II, who shaped southern Italy like no other sovereign. The cathedral of Altamura was also built on his orders. That's where we're headed next, but with a little detour through the beautiful Mercadante Forest, which was once created to protect the city of Bari from flooding.

Altamura is one of the most beautiful towns in Apulia and is known not only for its cathedral but also for its particularly tasty bread. We have lunch here and then make our way back to Matera, as we want to stroll through the city a little more. The view from Piazza Giovanni Pascoli is particularly beautiful, and there are also some nice cafés there. So nothing stands in the way of a relaxing afternoon...

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Highlights:

#1: Matera



Matera is one of the most interesting, unusual and memorable tourist destinations in Italy. It is a town famous for its extensive cave-dwelling districts, the Sassi. The caves of Matera had been inhabited for centuries and until the 1950s hundreds of families were still living crowded into cave-houses here, together with their animals and without running water. The living conditions became a national scandal, and finally the cave residents were moved - by law

- to modern buildings on the plateau above. In 1993, the town was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for being "the most outstanding, intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region, perfectly adapted to its terrain and ecosystem." And ever since, Matera has become steadily more popular as an off-the-beaten-track tourist destination. More and more old cave houses are being converted into comfortable modern dwellings, hotels, B&Bs, and restaurants. You can take guided tours of the Sassi and visit historic reconstructions of cave life.

#2: Gioia del Colle



Gioia del Colle, located in the heart of Apulia on the Murge plateau, is a town where history, culture, and rural charm converge. Of Byzantine origin, the town's story unfolds around its magnificent Norman-Swabian Castle, a proud landmark at the center of town. Dating back to the 9th century, this imposing fortress was shaped by Norman and Swabian rulers, notably Frederick II, who used it as a stately

hunting residence. Today, the castle houses the National Archaeological Museum, which displays precious artifacts from the region's ancient past. The castle also opens its halls to cultural events and exhibitions.

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#3: Altamura



Altamura, a historic town in the heart of Apulia west of Bari, is famous for its imposing city gates, narrow streets, and above all for the legendary Pane di Altamura—the famous bread that is prized throughout Italy for its quality and tradition.

Altamura's origins date back to ancient times, when the Peuketians settled on the Murge plateau. Its name derives from the “high wall” they built in the 5th century BC. In the Middle Ages, Emperor Frederick II rebuilt the city and gave it its present appearance with the monumental Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta and the “Claustri” – branching dead-end streets and courtyards.

But Altamura would be unimaginable without its world-famous bread: even the poet Horace praised Altamura bread in ancient Rome for its special delicacy. Pane di Altamura is a durum wheat bread characterized by a strong crust, rustic taste, and long shelf life. It is still baked today using traditional methods in wood-fired ovens – often in large, round loaves that feed many families. The grain comes from the fertile fields around Altamura, and the production process is so unique that it bears the Italian DOP seal (Denominazione di Origine Protetta).

Optional Route (172 km / 107 miles)

If you want to see more of Basilicata, feel the open road and the wind in your face, why not embark on this route? It'll take you south on tiny, twisty roads, across the wide valley of the Basento River, and into the hills on the other side. On one of them, you can find the deserted village of Craco clinging to the steep hillside. During the Middle Ages, it featured a university, a monastery, four large Palazzi, and a fortress, of course. This is hard to believe if you look at the ghost town today.

From Craco, you can spend two more hours on small, curvy roads and enjoy the scenery as well as a tasty lunch in Grassano, a lively town stretching along a mountain ridge. From there, it's about half an hour's ride back to Matera.

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Highlights:

#1: Matera



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#2: Craco



The ancient village of Craco, perched high on a rock, experienced its heyday from the 13th to the 17th century, with up to 3,000 people living here at times. Famine, wars, and looting led to the decline, several landslides, and finally an earthquake in 1980 sealed the fate of the settlement. Today, old Craco is an extremely photogenic ghost town and can be visited. Good shoes are recommended!



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RIDING DAY 3 : MATERA - LECCE

Standard Route (186 km / 116 miles)

Today's ride will take us to Lecce, Apulia's second-largest city and known as "The Florence of the South" due to its stunning Baroque architecture. En route, we will ride along the Salento's western coast, not all the time, but we'll spend enough time there for you to put your swimming trunks on and go for a dip.

Halfway through the day, we pay a visit to one of the world's biggest cities - at least that's what Taranto was, merely 2,500 years ago. The city gave its name not only to the huge gulf under the sole of the "Italian boot" but also to our eight-legged friend, the Tarantula spider.

After lunch and some sightseeing, we head back to the coast, enjoy some proper Italian Gelato on the beach, and then cover the last 25 km to our destination. Like in Matera, we will stay in Lecce for two nights.

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Highlights:

#1: Taranto (Tarent)



Nestled along the sparkling coast of southern Italy, Taranto is a city where history, culture, and natural beauty intertwine to create a captivating experience. Known as the "City of Two Seas" for its unique position between the Mar Grande and Mar Piccolo, Taranto carries centuries of stories dating back to its founding by Spartan settlers in the 8th century BC. Once a powerful city of Magna Graecia, Taranto

thrived as a center of ancient Greek culture, naval strength, and trade, its echoes visible today in the ruins, museums, and streets that tell tales of a glorious past.

#2: Nardò



Since its foundation in 1975 until today, the characteristic feature of the Nardò Technical Center has been the 12.6-kilometer circular test track with a diameter of 4 kilometers, which was completely renovated in 2019. Thanks to an internal incline that compensates for centrifugal force, the course allows a driving experience similar to that of a straight track, even at high speeds - ideal

for countless testing opportunities. Porsche Engineering Group GmbH, Weissach (Germany), is the operator of the test track.

Unfortunately, we can't visit, let alone ride or drive on it. There's not even an elevated viewpoint, so, unless you bring a drone, you won't see much of it.



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RIDING DAY 4 : LECCE

Standard Route (154 km / 96 miles)

Lecce is a beautiful city, and as on so many rest days on tours around the world, you don't need to get on your bike to enjoy a wonderful, fulfilling day here. The old town is large, there is a castle and a cathedral, and countless cozy cafés and restaurants.

If you still want to ride, follow the tour guide on a tour around the “heel” of Italy. First to the west coast, where an interesting little museum and the island old town of Gallipoli await us. Then we head over to the East Coast, which only takes a good hour here. After lunch, we ride past the easternmost point of Italy and many beautiful beaches and bays where the turquoise blue sea glitters seductively. Lucky are those who have their swimming trunks with them...

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Highlights:

#1: Lecce



Puglia's southernmost provincial metropolis, the pearl of Apulian Baroque, takes its visitors by storm. The secret of the baroque wealth of forms lies in the pietra leccese, the limestone of Lecce. It is quarried in open-cast mines and is light-colored and fine-grained. Fresh from the quarry, it can be worked with a knife like butter. In the air it hardens slowly, taking on a golden yellow tone. Such a material set

no limits to the imagination of stonemasons and architects. Free of traffic, the elegant centro storico invites visitors to take extended strolls. During the day, the golden-yellow limestone facades glow in the sun; in the evening, spotlights bathe them in an enchanting stage light. 30 churches and countless palazzi shine in baroque splendor. All important monuments are provided with bilingual information boards.

#2: Museo della Memoria e dell'Accoglienza



British Allies maintained the "Displaced Persons Camp No 34" in Santa Maria del Bagno from 1944 to 1947, which housed well over 100,000 Jews, survivors from the concentration camps. Welcomed with open arms by the local population, they waited here for their onward journey to Israel. Among them were later heads of state David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir. This modern museum presents

contemporary photographs, and a wall fresco stylizes the Italian boot as a refuge for the surviving Jews and a bridgehead for their return home to Eretz Yisrael.

#3: Gallipoli



All white, sweating under the sun, Gallipoli lies like a ship of stone on a flat limestone island in the Ionian Sea. It experienced its heyday in the 17th and 18th centuries. Lamp oil pressed from olives, which enjoyed a lively demand on international markets, made the city rich. In exchange, luxury goods from all over the world came to

Gallipoli, and large trading companies moved their headquarters here. The wealth seemed inexhaustible. But, as always, the only certain thing is change. With the competition of cheap petroleum, Gallipoli lost its monopoly position at the beginning of the 19th century.



APULIA BY SCOOTER

RIDING DAY 5 : LECCE - MOLFETTA

Standard Route (197 km / 122 miles)

Our last day brings us back to Molfetta, quite a long journey, for which we will also cover a few miles on larger roads. We leave the densely populated coast behind us and ride through the hinterland.

Apulia is famous for its trulli, which are made of dry-laid stones and crowned with a pointed roof. Alberobello is THE trulli capital and our highlight today. The town is quite touristy, but this has the advantage that you can definitely find the last souvenir you're missing here.

Shortly before our destination, we reach the Adriatic coast, where we treat ourselves to one last caffè or gelato before filling up the Vespas and returning them. Even the most beautiful tour must come to an end...

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Highlights:

#1: Locorotondo



Locorotondo, just under 9 km southeast of Alberobello, is far quieter and for some therefore more charming than the trulli capital. The circular Centro Storico with its whitewashed houses is extremely inviting. The name of the town comes from the shape of the historic center: "locus rotundus" - round place. One of the most beautiful views over the Valle d'Itra can be enjoyed from the well

signposted lookout point - Belvedere. The many wine terraces in the surrounding area cannot be overlooked. As early as 1930, the first winegrowers' cooperative in Puglia was founded in the town, the Cantina del Locorotondo, which received the D.O.C. seal for its white wine in 1969. Locorotondo therefore also likes to advertise with the label "Città del Vino Bianco" - City of White Wine. I think we should try it!

#2: Alberobello



Puglia is famous for its trulli, and there are more of them in Alberobello than anywhere else. More than 1,000 trulli are spread across the two old town quarters. But what exactly is a trullo? Why were they constructed this way? Construction began between 1600 and 1665. At the time, the Earl of the area, Gian Girolamo II, charged taxes on permanent walled settlements. To avoid these taxes, the

clever peasants built their houses out of stone without using cement or mortar. This way, in case of a royal inspection, they could dismantle and rebuild the stone houses quickly. It was labor-intensive, but it saved a lot of money.

The trulli's interstices, filled with straw and earth, provided perfect insulation from summer heat and winter cold. The builders showed true skill in constructing the cone-shaped roofs. In the past, magic signs were painted on the gray stone roofs with lime paint. Though the meaning of many symbols has been forgotten, they are still painted every year as a tradition.



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