



*Independent walking tour (DHBC)*

# Basilicata & Calabria

*Discovering Italy's least-known regions, between splendid mountain scenery, medieval villages and grand canyons*



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## TRIP NOTES

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## INTRODUCTION

*Stunning mountain scenery, grand canyons to rival the best, medieval villages where time stands still - you can find it all in the heart of Italy's deep south. Often overlooked by large tour operators, Basilicata and Calabria offer a plethora of hidden gems where you can get a taste and feel of the authentic Italy.*

*You begin your tour in Castelmezzano, in the mountainous inland of the so-called 'Dolomites' of Lucania. Considered one of Italy's most beautiful villages, Castelmezzano has certainly had its fair share of history since being founded by Greek settlers between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC: Saracens, Lombards and Normans have all left their marks – and it is the 'Norman steps' that you'll get to climb here, up to a wonderful viewpoint near the village of Pietrapertosa. From here you walk a beautiful path where seven 'speaking stones' let you in on the secrets of a local legend. The real highlight here though is your route back to Castelmezzano. Walking through the valley of these 'southern Dolomites' is special enough, but the alternative option offers you a chance to see it from a stunning perspective: il Volo dell'Angelo (the Flight of the Angel).*

*You continue your tour with a visit to the village of Aliano, home to a museum dedicated to Carlo Levi, the painter/writer famous for his memoirs, 'Christ stopped at Eboli' – and you will visit a number of the villages mentioned in this book on your beautiful day walks. If the picturesque landscape and ghost town of Craco seem familiar to you it may be because it has been used in a number of famous films (including The Passion of the Christ and Quantum of Solace).*

*From here you head to Matera. This city, listed as World Heritage by UNESCO, is truly unique with its famous 'Sassi' – centuries-old cave dwellings cut out of the cliffs, which housed a large number of the city's population until just a few decades ago. You will enjoy exploring this amazing architecture, visiting cave churches, castles and art galleries, as you make a wonderful walk out of the city and into the Gravina canyon, through several rural villages downstream.*

*Your next destination lies further south, on the Ionian coastline. Ancient Greek temples and remote mountain villages are the highlights of your walks through forest and rocky areas, before you visit Civita, a village in the Pollino National Park that dominates the Raganello river gorge. Here you discover the local Albanian culture and take a walk that starts from the scenic village centre and leads into Italy's very own 'Grand Canyon', with stunning viewpoints such as the Devil's Bridge.*

*You take in more of the stunning cultural heritage as you move on to Morano Calabro. Your walk here takes you to a Norman castle and through one of the most scenic village centres of southern Italy. Then it's time for some beautiful nature again: you follow the River Lao down to the coast, with several occasions to descend into its stunning canyon: at the Grotta del Romito, a cave dwelling with some fascinating prehistoric artwork, and at the Byzantine village of Papisidero, where an easy walk brings you to a great sanctuary down at a medieval bridge over the river. To finish your tour you have several options: the hotel in Scalea is located on a sandy beach where you can of course relax. As well there are many options for a last great walk or sightseeing.*



*During this tour you can choose the difficulty level of the excursions yourself. Walks follow easy routes without any technical difficulties and are feasible for anyone who has some walking experience and is in a good physical condition. Walking times: approx. 2-5 hours a day.*



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## DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

*In case you arrive late in Naples, it is recommended planning an overnight stay halfway, for example in the spa town of Contursi terme. A bit further you could opt for a stay in beautiful **Brienza**, just above the so-called Vallo di Diano, a highplain in the southern part of Campania, in between the Basilicata and Cilento National Park. This will give you the opportunity to visit the stunning grottoes at Pertosa, southern Italy's biggest abbey, the Certosa of Padula, as well as the 'Valley of the Painted villages', Italy's largest concentration of murales, the waterfalls at Savoia and charming Teggiano. And you could go to Sasso di Castlido where you can make a great roundwalk, including the crossing over the canyon with one of Italy's longest 'Tibet-stule' pedestrian suspension bridges.*



### Day 1 – Arrival in Basilicata, the Deep South

Today you travel by car to the little village of Castelmezzano, about 180 km south of Naples (or to Brienza – a bit closer). The journey takes you through the southern part of Campania and then along the capital of the Basilicata, Potenza. The last part is very scenic and includes a spectacular ride up to Castelmezzano (in case you are early we recommend to drive to Pietrapertosa too). In the evening you have dinner in one of the region's best restaurants.

#### Hotel - Castelmezzano

*Driving time: 2-3 h. (from Naples).*

### Day 2 – The 'Dolomites' of southern Italy

Today you make a roundwalk through the beautiful mountain scenery of these southern 'Dolomites'. After buying lunch in the village, you first have a stroll through the old village centre of Castelmezzano, and then walk up into the higher mountains, enjoying great views over the whole area. You walk up to the remains of the old Norman castle and perhaps you can climb the impressive 'Norman steps', carved into the bare rock, up to a stunning viewpoint. After lunch you walk on to the nearby village of Pietrapertosa, once an important Arab, and later Norman stronghold. To get here you have to cross the river valley, along a beautiful walkway, the 'path of the seven speaking stones'. A short stroll through the village of Pietrapertosa should of course include the visit to its amazing castle. You have two options for your return to Castelmezzano: you could walk through the valley or take an 'Angel's Flight' (il *Volo dell'Angelo* – the highest zip wire in the world, offering you the chance to 'fly' over 1400m between the two villages). Either way you return, at night you have the time to stroll through the fairy-tale like village and choose the right premises for a nice meal.

#### Hotel - Castelmezzano

*Total walking distance: 10 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: + 600 m./- 350 m. (with walk back to Castelmezzano: 13 km. +/- 850 m.)*

### Day 3 – Discovering the heart of Lucania: from Castelmezzano to Aliano

A short drive this morning takes you along a panoramic into the real 'Deep South', the old Roman 'Lucania', now called Basilicata ('land of the basilicas'). We recommend to stop along the road in some of the villages where time



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seems to have stood still: beautifully restored Guardia Perticara and the village of Gorgoglione, where you can also make a short walk into the Grotto of the 'Brigante'. Your final stop for today is at one of the most characteristic and intriguing places of this virtually undiscovered area: the small village of Aliano. Here you have to take your time for a coffee and a stroll through the village, after which you can visit the museum of the writer-painter Carlo Levi ('Christ stopped at Eboli') and enjoy a stunning presentation of life in southern Italy, the 'Mezzogiorno', at the house where Carlo Levi was 'confined' under Fascist rule. In case you are early you can also opt to make a nice walk through the intriguing 'calanchi', odd-shaped clay hills. Then enjoy an 'aperitivo' in the square, a great opportunity to indulge in small village life. To end the day you'll have a great dinner in a nice nearby restaurant. An evening stroll concludes a day in the real heart of the Basilicata.

#### **Hotel - Aliano**

*Total walking distance: 9 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 300 m. Driving time: 3 h.*

#### **Day 4 – Discovering the heart of Lucania: from Aliano to Matera**

In case you did not have the time yesterday in the morning you should make the nice walk through the intriguing 'calanchi', just outside Aliano, an absolutely unique, strange moon-like landscape. Then travel on past the abandoned village of Alianello. Your next stop will be at the ghost town of 'Craco', a completely abandoned village, now only occasionally used as a film set. You can make a nice walk through the village and its immediate surroundings. A short drive will then bring you to the whitewashed village of Pisticci, where you can enjoy an 'aperitivo' towards the end of the afternoon. Moving on, you then arrive at one of the most extraordinary spots on Earth: Matera, listed as an official World Heritage site by UNESCO (an absolute must-see). This unique city is famous for its 'Sassi' (which literally means 'stones') style of housing. The 'Sassi' are actually cave dwellings, carved out of the stone sides of the cliff edge over the canyon, a unique form of housing, which goes back many centuries, which today almost look like a crèche. The evening walk through the 'Sassi' is simply stunning!

#### **Hotel - Matera**

*Total walking distance: 9 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 300 m. Driving time: 3 h.*



#### **Day 5 – From Matera, city of the 'Sassi', to Montescaglioso, through the 'Grand Canyon'**

Following breakfast, you enjoy a walking tour of the 'Sassi' area, divided into the more ancient Sasso Caveoso and the more built-up Sasso Barisano areas. The unworldly atmosphere, and the style of housing and life in the cliffs are unique. There's an impressive series of cave churches, with wonderful medieval frescos, the museum of rural civilisation, the unfinished 15th-century castle, the D'Errico gallery of Neapolitan art in Palazzo Lanfranchi, the Churches of Purgatory, St. Francis of Assisi, S. Lucia and Materdomini, and of course the cathedral, sticking out with its Romanesque silhouette. Tiny streets and backstreet cafes always spring up around each corner and are well worth exploring. During your walk you will discover the unusual architecture of this city step-by-step. Towards the end of the morning you buy picnic supplies and descend into the 'Gravina', the canyon beneath Matera.



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You follow the canyon downstream in a southern direction, through an unworldly landscape, full of cave dwellings (sometimes entire 'villages') and cave churches. Lunch can be had in a nice place somewhere along the route. You will eat on a terrace overlooking the city and the canyon. Towards the end of the afternoon you reach the southern part of the canyon, just below the charming little town of Montescaglioso. From here you can either walk on or take the local bus to Montescaglioso for a quick visit and an 'aperitivo', before you return by bus to Matera. In the evening you have several options for a nice dinner (not included) near to the hotel.

#### **Hotel - Matera**

*Total walking distance: 15 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. Ascent & descent: + 250 m./- 150 m. Driving time: 0,5 h.*

#### **Day 6 – From Matera, along the Ionian Coast, and into Calabria**

After breakfast you head south, down to the Ionian Sea with its broad sandy beaches. You make a stop near the coast at the Greek Metapontum, to have a look at the remains of the Greek temples, and pay a visit to Sibari, once one of the most affluent (sybaritic) Greek cities. After a visit to the archaeological site, you head inland towards the Pollino National Park. Here you will make an easy, but beautiful, walk through forest and rocky areas, touching some of the most interesting sites in the area: the villages of San Lorenzo and Cerchiara, and the stunning Madonna degli Armi, a Byzantine church with magnificent views over the Ionian Sea. In the late afternoon you travel on to the beautiful village of Civita, dominating the entrance of the Raganello river gorge. Civita is of Albanian origin, founded by exiles fleeing from the Turkish domination of the Balkans. You will spend the next two nights in Civita, a full immersion in the local 'Albanian' culture (and food!). Already tonight you can make a short walk through the historical heart of Civita, learning more about its origins and absorbing the great atmosphere, before dining on fantastic local food in a nearby restaurant.

#### **Hotel - Civita**

*Total walking distance: 9 km. Approx. walking time: 3,5 h. Ascent & descent: + 100 m./- 250 m. Driving time: 2 h.*

#### **Day 7 – Civita & the Pollino National Park**

Today you'll start a beautiful 5-hour walk directly from your hotel. First you discover the beautiful village centre, then follow a great walking path past some stunning viewpoints over southern Italy's 'Grand Canyon'. Next you start going down into the canyon, following an old mule track, which leads to the so-called 'Devil's Bridge' – a medieval bridge which spans over the narrowest part of the canyon. You can hike a short stretch into the canyon, up to the point where the water fills the whole width of the increasingly narrow gorge. You'll then make an easy walk, following the riverbed, to a beautifully located agriturismo, where you can enjoy a country lunch (not included). After lunch there is some time for a rest, before walking back to the village which you reach halfway through the afternoon. The rest of the afternoon is at leisure; we strongly recommend you visit the Orthodox Church, the interesting landscape museum, and of course indulge in the local village life. You are free to make your own dinner arrangements tonight.

#### **Hotel - Civita**

*Total walking distance: 14 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 300 m.*



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### **Optional Extra Day – Into the Pollino National Park**

*Especially in Summer it is strongly recommended to book an extra day (or better two) in order to explore the highlands of the Pollino National Park. Staying in a luxurious 'Rifugio' ('mountain hut') you are close to some of the best walks in the area. On one day you can make the loop along the highsets summits of the Pollino Massive, Mt. Pollino itself, and the highest top 'Dolcedorme' ('Sweet Sleep'). The next day you can go for another walk discovering the stunning highplains, rural chapels and extraordinary vegetation. Also the small villages of Rotonda and Viggianello (with a real dinosaur in the local museum) are worth a visit.*

#### **Rifugio 'Fasanelli' \*\*\* – Pollino**

### **Day 8 – Morano Calabro & the Lao Canyon**

This day is a day full of emotions, again a full immersion in local culture, and surrounded by impressive nature. A short drive brings you to Morano Calabro, one of Italy's most scenic villages. From the castle, with stunning views over the Pollino National Park, you can walk all the way down through its characteristic narrow alleys.

You have the time to buy some picnic supplies and a coffee. Then, through the high plains of the Orsomarso Mountains, you travel to the canyon of the River Lao, one of southern Italy's most spectacular canyons. You can park your car in the beautiful village of Papisidero, and embark on a wonderful walk into the canyon, heading for a pre-historic cave dwelling, the Grotta del Romito, where some amazing drawings can be admired. You can enjoy your picnic lunch, with some time to rest by the river. After returning to Papisidero you travel down to the coast, where you settle in a nice hotel, just outside the beautiful village centre of Scalea, near the large sandy beach. In alternative you can stay in a beautifully restored old noble palace in the small village of Maierà.

#### **Hotel - Scalea (Maierà)**

*Total walking distance: 11 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: + 300 m./- 400 m. Driving time: 3 h.*

### **Optional Extra Day – Exploring the Grand Canyon of the River Lao**

*In case you like some adrenaline it is strongly recommended to go for a half-day of rafting through the canyon of the River Lao, one of the best rafting experiences in Italy. In order to do this you can book an extra night either in Rotondo or directly in Laino where the rafting starts. Especially in Summer this is a great, cool, thing to do!*

#### **Hotel Rotonda /B&B \*\*\* - Laino**

### **Day 9 – The 'Riviera dei Cedri' – Scalea, Cirella and Orsomarso**

For this last day you have several options: of course there is the beautiful beach just below the hotel to enjoy, but we suggest you also do the roundwalk to the pretty old town centre of Scalea. Go for a half-day rafting into the Lao Canyon is also a great option. The real walkers can opt for a great hike into the Orsomarso Mountains, for example into the valley of the Argentino River, starting from the charming village of Orsomarso. And you should make the beautiful short walk through the abandoned village of Cirella (destroyed by Napoleon's fleet), overlooking the Mediterranean. Walk from here down to the beach, preferably in the late afternoon, to enjoy some stunning views. Other options include a visit to the village of Santa Maria del Cedro, the world's capital of cedar fruit – the fruit from cedars here is perhaps better than anywhere else. This local specialty is the ideal 'digestivo', great to finish to your last evening meal here in Calabria!

#### **Hotel - Scalea (Maierà)**

*Total walking distance: 11 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: + 300 m./- 400 m. Driving time: 3 h.*



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### **Optional Extra Days in the Orsomarso Mountains**

For hikers it is strongly recommended to book an extra day (or better two) in order to explore the Orsomarso Mountains, perhaps Italy's last real wilderness. Apart from the easy hike into the valley of the Argentino River, this area has much to offer! To explore the inland of mountain range, including the summits, Montea, Mula and Pellegrino, but also the wild Fiume Rosa, and the 'Valley of the Mills' between Maiera and Grisolia, we have several good accommodations available, close to the best walks in the area. Please note, these are real hikes, for expert walkers only!

### **Day 10 – Departure from Maierà /Scalea**

After breakfast your tour ends. Perhaps you'll have some time still to dive into the Mediterranean (your hotel is located at the most beautiful beach in Scalea, so going for a swim might be a good option), before travelling back home (or on to your next destination...). The drive back to Naples takes about 2,5-3 h.



## **TOUR DETAILS**

### **ACCOMMODATION & MEALS**

All nights are spent in beautiful hotels and B&Bs (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Most accommodations are on half-board basis. Please check the inclusions for the dinners included. When dinner is not included, you will be free to choose from the range of restaurants in the local area for your evening meal.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages which you will be passing through.

### **UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION**

*It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.*



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## INCLUDED

- 9 nights accommodation – BB/HB
- 2 nights in Hotel \*\*\* in Castelmezzano – 1 x HB/1 x BB
- 1 night in Hotel \*\*\* in Aliano – BB
- 2 nights in Hotel \*\*\* in Matera – BB
- 1 dinner in Matera
- 2 nights in B&B in Civita – BB
- 1 dinner in Civita
- 2 nights in B&B in Scalea – BB
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale (or better)
- 24/7 h. local assistance

## NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips & Items of personal nature
- Car rental

## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

**Arrival:** The standard tour starts in CASTELMEZZANO. You drive to the village from either Naples or Bari airport (daily flights from many European cities), which takes about 2 hours.

**Departure:** The standard tour ends in SCALEA. From here you can reach Naples in about 2,5 hours. Alternatively, you can reach the airport of Lamezia Terme, which has international flights to a number of European cities (as well as Toronto), in about 2 hours.

## TOUR VARIATIONS

***One of the main characteristics of a Genius Loci Travel 'Drive & Hike, Walk & Discover' Tour is the freedom you have in putting together not only your own daily programme, but also the length of the tour and the places to visit.***

The above programme is only an example of what is possible and shows you the great variety of this part of southern Italy, both the authentic inland areas, as well as the stupendous coastline. According to your interests we can easily adapt the programme to your preferences.

## EXTRA NIGHTS

For more time on the seaside, we can recommend several nice spots in Diamante, Maratea or the southern Cilento. Walking options will be provided. You can also extend your tour with a few days in Naples or on the Amalfi Coast. Details and prices on request.

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