



Southern Italy 'Coast-to-Coast' Bike Challenge

*Cycling across southern Italy, through the real 'Mezzogiorno':
Puglia, Basilicata & the Cilento National Park*



TRIP NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

A great week of biking through southern Italy's less-travelled but breathtaking regions. This tour, full of pleasant surprises, zigzags along an intriguing route through Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria showing the real 'Mezzogiorno'.

Southern Italy's natural beauty, ancient culture, deeply-rooted local traditions, genuine Mediterranean food and above all the warmth and hospitality of its people, will capture you and leave you with an unforgettable feeling. There are many good reasons to visit this area. Some come for the beauty of its olive groves carpeted with wild-flowers or the odd charm of its trulli. Italians seek out orecchiette, artichokes, wild asparagus and red peppers, knowing that the hot sun, dry soil, and salty breezes make for intense flavour. As cyclists to this undiscovered region of Italy, we'll enjoy all the above and more – along some of the quietest roads Italy has to offer.

Expect a rewarding ride every day - and along with the ride you'll experience the 'real Italy', with intimate insights into southern Italian life every day. We'll cycle through areas and villages which, not without reason, have been nominated 'World Heritage' by UNESCO, like the wonderful towns of Alberobello and Matera.

The tour starts in Puglia, the south-eastern part of the Italian peninsula. Mostly of its territory is flat, which makes it the less mountainous region of Italy. Our hotel is a historical palace in the heart of beautiful Monopoli, a . Much of the region's interior is covered by olive groves, interspersed with orchards and other crops. If you have only seen small olive groves before, the endless 'forests' of olive trees come as a surprising sight. Although the area is dry with low rainfall, the people here like to grow large quantities of fruit and vegetables, and their cuisine is rich in local products like beans, chicory and broccoli.

On our second day we'll cycle in western direction towards perhaps Italy's least known region, the Basilicata. Here you can feast your eyes on the vast cultivated fields, natural preserves, strange rock formations, and tiny ancient towns. Our first accommodation here is in Matera, the city of stone, one of Italy's most intriguing cities, partly built underground. A stay in Matera is a unique experience, reason why we'll stay two nights! Do not forget to go for an after dinner stroll, when the city looks like a mysterious Christmas crèche. In Matera you'll need the time to visit, but you can also make a great ride through the intriguing landscape of the 'Murge', the canyons of southern Italy.

The next day, leaving Matera, we head South-East for a full immersion in the 'Deep South'. First we'll pass at the small town of Pisticci. Then we cycle on towards the abandoned town of Craco, once an important town and monastic centre, now a complete ghost town. We'll stay for the night in the small town of Aliano, one of the most interesting villages of the area. From here on the tour becomes more challenging, as we start our journey through the Central Apennines, which we'll have to cross to end on the Tyrrhenian coast. We'll make a great ride in the shadow of the Pollino mountains and overnight in the nice village of Rotonda. Then we continue towards the coast at Maratea, but first we'll climb to the top of Mount San Biagio, with the Statue of the Christ of Maratea, a 22-meter high statue overlooking the entire stretch of coastline.

The last day is a great day of superb cycling, along the beautiful coastal road from Maratea into the southern part of Campania - a fitting end to this Southern Italy Biking Adventure. And of course you'll have the occasion to dive into the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

Please note: this is a moderate tour which is suitable for all those who have experience of bicycle touring and are in a good general physical condition. On some of the inland stretches you may encounter some steeper climbs. Average cycling times: approx 5-6 hours each day. On request for bespoke groups we can adapt the length/difficulty of each stage – as well as the total length of the tour.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 Arrival Bari – Transfer to Monopoli

Arrival in Bari and transfer to our beautiful hotel in the historical heart of Monopoli, a stunning whitewashed seaside village. After settling in our rooms we'll have a light dinner and those who want can go for a stroll through the old town. In case we arrive early we can already start to check our bicycles, do a briefing, and start with a flat ride along the coast.

Hotel in Monopoli

Day 2 Monopoli – Matera

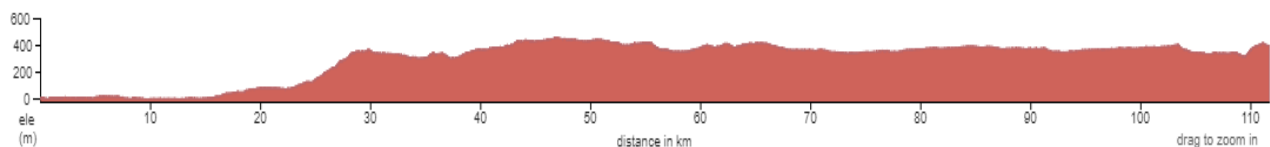
Today we start with a flat ride along the coast. Then we turn inland, and tackle a few ascents, heading for beautiful Alberobello, a UNESCO world heritage site, in the heart of the Itria Valley, a karstic depression filled with thousands of olive trees and many so-called 'trulli', odd cone shaped white washed buildings. A first 'warm-up climb' brings us onto the large rolling plateau, where we will be cycling through fields of fennel and ancient stands of olive trees. Now we are really entering in the heart of the 'Land of Trulli', the concentration of these curious buildings becomes higher and higher, culminating in Alberobello, the capital town of the Trulli, where there even is a church in this shape. We'll take our time for a coffee and a short stroll here, before cycling on to beautiful Noci and then Gioia del Colle.



The last part of the route goes through open fields, en route to the amazing city of Matera, one of the most extraordinary spots on Earth. Matera, on UNESCO's official World Heritage List, is famous for its so-called 'Sassi' (which literally means 'stones') style of housing. These cave dwellings were carved out of the stone sides of the cliffs and tell of a time when there were few options for the poor citizens of the region. Most caves were inhabited until last century. We ride the last few through this amazing scenery of small streets and squares, caves, rock churches and cellars, to our centrally located hotel in Matera, right in the heart of the 'Sassi'. After settling in at your hotel you have some free time to wander around or have an 'aperitivo' in one of the beautiful squares. Then we gather together for a great evening meal, in one of the prettiest restaurants in town. But the best has yet to come: the evening walk through the Sassi is simply stunning!

Distance : 70 MILES (112 km.) – Elevation: +1240 m/-800 m

Hotel in Matera



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Day 3 Matera Roundtrip

Today we make a beautiful roundtrip from Matera, to explore its surroundings, a large plateau, divided by several canyons, in which many cave dwellings and cave churches can be found. For this reason the area is now a protected area known as the 'Park of the Cave Churches'. We first cycle in southern direction. You will ride through rolling hills, skirting the Park of Rock Churches, an amazing landscape, a veritable natural wonder – a series of ravines created by the erosive powers of rainwater. Already from far away you will notice the beautiful hilltop town of Montescaglioso, home of a powerful and prestigious abbey which once controlled a huge swath of surrounding land. The major climb into Montescaglioso is worth it for the opportunity to visit this enchanting little village where time seems to have stopped. Here we'll have a short biscuit stop and a look around - a visit to the Benedictine Abbey is a must! Then we will get on our bikes again and swing through the small village of Ginosa – a smaller version of Matera with a very similar cave dwelling quarter. Then we pedal all together on to our lunch spot: Laterza – where we visit a local bakery to sample the famous 'Pane di Laterza'. After lunch we head back to Matera, but not without a stop on the plateau at the opposite side of Matera's canyon. From the Belvedere here we have some stunning views on the city, which is only a short stretch away.

After a drink we ride the last few kilometers back to our hotel in Matera, right in the heart of the 'Sassi'. Now you are free to relax and have time to explore. This will be our the shortest ride of all the tour because we want to be sure to have enough time to wonder around the old city of Matera on your own. You are free to choose from the wide selection of restaurants and pizzerias to for your evening meal tonight. There are many typical restaurants, only a short stroll from our hotel.

Distance: 47 MILES (75 km) – Elevation: +1236 m/-1239 m

Hotel in Matera

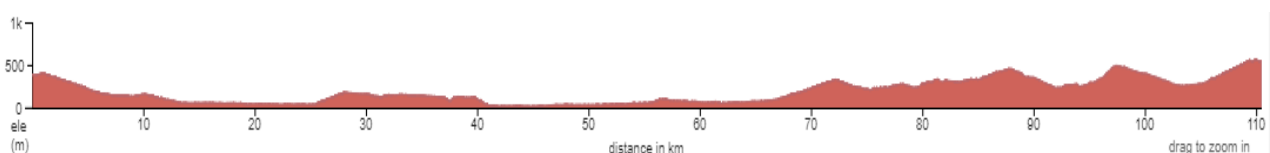


Day 4 From Matera through the deep Basilicata to Aliano

Today our ride will be over 62 miles (100 km). We start with an easy downhill section through the fields, towards the hilltop town of Bernalda, a charming village, where the origins of Francis Ford Coppola lay (he recently opened a beautiful hotel here). After the climb to the centre we deserve a short rest and a drink, after which we spin down into the valley of the Basento River. Past the white village of Pisticci, we then continue to Craco, an abandoned medieval village set in a stunning location. The settlement occupies a rock formation above the surrounding hills with its architecture neatly built into the landscape. Perched strategically on top of a 400 meter (1,300 ft) high cliff, overlooking, this ghost town provides panoramic views of the arid countryside of southern Italy. Our final destination for today is Aliano, in the middle of the moonlike landscape of the 'calanchi', strange clay hills. On top of one of these hills, in an awesome position, Aliano, during the Fascist Regime, was used as detention zone for the Regime's dissidents. The writer/painter Carlo Levi, known for his book 'Christ stopped at Eboli' spent many years here. Perhaps you still have the energy to visit his museum and go for a stroll around the village. In the evening, you eat at a great local restaurant.

Distance : 68 MILES (110 km.) – Elevation: +1634 m/-1481 m

Hotel in Aliano



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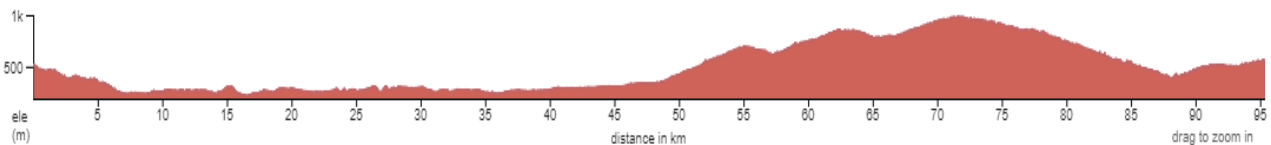


Day 5 From the clay hills of Aliano to Rotonda in the Pollino Mountains

Today we will make a great ride through the authentic 'Deep South' of Italy, an area virtually unknown to most travellers, but which yet offers some amazing scenery. The first 10 km. go down through the unreal landscape of the 'calanchi', with some scattered houses and half-abandoned villages. Perhaps a short stop at the small Alianello is worth it. Then we continue for a few hours through a pleasant, rolling landscape. We pass the big lake at Senise, and then already see the imposing silhouette of the Pollino Massive, the high mountains on the border between Basilicata and Calabria. We climb up to almost a 1000 m. here, following a stunning winding road through the villages of San Severino, Viggianello and finally Rotonda, a beautiful medieval village where we will stay in a great hotel in the heart of town. We'll eat in a local restaurant, based on local specialties.

Distance : 59 MILES (95 km.) – Elevation: +1713 m/ -1664 m

Hotel in Rotonda

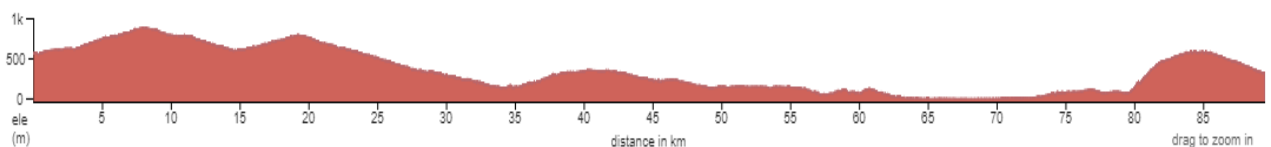


Day 6 Rotonda to Maratea

Today we head down for the Tyrrhenian Sea, but first we'll tackle a few minor climbs, to reach the village of Mormanno. From here it is one amazing ride down to the sea, perhaps the most scenic ride of the entire region. Following the canyon of the River Lao we'll arrive in the charming village of Papisidero, a good spot for a coffee break. Then we continue along the river Lao, and we'll reach the beautifully located village of San Domenico Talao. From here we can opt to cycle down to the seaside resort of Scalea, or in alternative ride directly to the charming village of San Nicola. A winding road will bring us down to the seashore here, in front of the island of Dino. We'll have lunch on the beach and those who want can go for a swim. We then continue in northern direction and cross the border between Calabria and Basilicata. We cycle along the stunning coastal road in the direction of beautiful Maratea, our final destination for today. The ride will end in the heart of the charming old town, where we'll stay in a beautifully restored old convent. Those who want can make a last effort and ride up to the Statue of the Christ of Maratea, second only to the Christ of Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro, situated on Mt. San Biagio, at 600 m above sea level. This is arguably the most scenic spot of the whole region, with an exceptional 360° view of the coast and inland mountains. At night we'll have dinner on the premises of the hotel.

Distance : 56 MILES (90 km.) – Elevation: +1850 m/ -2098 m

Hotel in Maratea



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Day 7 From Maratea to the southern Cilento Coast

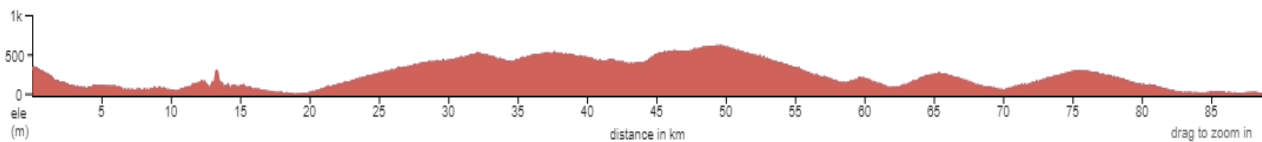
Today we continue to follow the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea in northern direction, cycling across the border, into Campania along a beautiful road high above the cliffs of the rocky coastline. At Sapri, the first village of Campania, the coast becomes flatter and those who want an easy day can opt to follow the coast for another 10 km. to reach charming Scario, our destination for tonight. But it is worth it to discover part of the area immediately inland from Sapri, among the most scenic, authentic areas of southern Italy. We'll cycle up to the village of Torraca, and then on to Tortorella, towering high above two beautiful canyons. A few kilometres further we'll arrive in Casaletto Spartano, which boasts one of the most beautiful waterfalls of the area, locally known as the 'Capelli di Venere' (Venus hair). At lunch time we arrive in Morigerati, where we can have a great lunch in the town square.



After lunch we continue through the rolling hills for another while, but then end the day with a great descend towards the Gulf of Policastro. We end our trip in beautiful Scario.

Distance : 56 MILES (90 km.) – Elevation: +1924 m/ -2240 m

Hotel in Scario



Day 8 Departure from Scario

The tour ends today after breakfast in Scario. A short private transfer takes us to the train station of Policastro, from where you can easily travel on to Salerno and Naples. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Accommodation is mainly on a half-board basis (depending on your choice of hotels – see inclusions) in good 3-star hotels and comfortable agriturismo's (comparable to a 3-star hotel). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

On the evenings that you will be free to organise your dinner, you have a wide choice of restaurants in the area.

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 where you'll be staying.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

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

INCLUDED

- 1 (2) nights in Hotel Monopoli **** – BB
- 2 nights in Hotel in Matera *** - 1 HB + 1 BB
- 1 night in Hotel in Aliano*** - HB
- 1 night in Hotel in Rotonda*** - HB
- 1 night in Hotel in Maratea*** - HB
- 1 night in Hotel in Scario / San Giovanni a Piro**** - HB
- All private & public transfers as indicated throughout the entire itinerary
- Support van & mechanical assistance for the duration of the tour
- Special activities as outlined in the day-by day-itinerary
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport

NOT INCLUDED

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

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate (3): Mostly moderate rides but inevitably with several climbs, only a few of which are really strenuous. All roads are well paved and mostly quiet, with little traffic except for some stretches near Paestum.



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Fitness: Some experience of bicycle touring and a good general physical condition will certainly make your travel experience more enjoyable. You should be able to cycle for several hours a day even in hot dry weather conditions.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in MONOPOLI; a pick-up service (included) will be arranged from the train station, which can easily be reached from Bari, the nearest city with an international airport.

Departure: The tour ends in SCARIO/SAN GIOVANNI A PIRO. A short transfer brings you to the train station (included), from where you travel on to your next destination (Naples, Salerno or Rome can all be easily reached). Several taxi services are available to bring you directly to your next destination.



TOUR VARIATIONS

This tour shows you the best parts of the unknown southern Italy – but there are several perhaps equally beautiful areas to be discovered. Therefore this tour can be adapted to your wishes – and special interests. We strongly recommend to extend the tour with a few days (cycling) along the stunning Cilento Coastline.

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to include extra nights in any of the accommodations en route. As well is it possible to extend your tour with a few days in Salerno, Naples, or along the Amalfi Coast. Details and prices on request.

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