



*Individual walking tour (VFS3)*

# Via 'Francigena del Sud'

The 'Via Appia Traiana' from Benevento to Bari

*Through the heart of southern Italy to the Coast of Puglia*



## TRIP NOTES

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## INTRODUCTION

*Walking this stretch of the Via Francigena del Sud you'll leave the region of Campania, the area called Campania Felix, or 'Happy Land' by the Romans, and enter the region of Puglia, mostly known for its whitewashed villages, but here you'll traverse a virtually unknown part of the region, the charming Dauni Mountains and the highplain of the Tavoliere, where the roads seem to head towards the Infinite.*

*Your route during this part of the tour roughly follows the traces of an ancient Roman road, the Via Appia Traiana. This road was built in 109 AD by Emperor Trajan at his own expense, as an extension of the Via Appia from Beneventum, reaching Brundisium (Brindisi) by a shorter route (i.e. via Canusium, Butuntum and Barium rather than via Tarentum). This was commemorated by the stunning arch at Beneventum, where your route starts. The Roman geographer Strabo writes indeed that traveling to Beneventum from Brundisium via the route of the Via Traiana was a good day shorter than the old Via Appia. Although actual measurements show the Via Appia to be 203 miles (327 km) and the Via Traiana 205 miles (330 km) from Benevento to Brindisi, the difference is in their topography. There are a number of severe hills and difficult terrain along the Via Appia until it reaches Venusia which is about 66 miles (106 km) away from Beneventum. In contrast, although Via Traiana does encounter some equally demanding passages in the first 40 miles from Benevento, there are no more serious hills after that, all the way down to Brundisium! Therefore, apart from the first two stages in Campania (we recommend to walk these in 3 days!), you won't encounter big hills any more, but only rolling hills with extensive wheat fields, and olive groves during the last days, before reaching Bari.*

*This part of the Via Appia is the most 'off-the-beaten-track' part of the whole route from Rome to Brindisi, the part which brings you through the heart of southern Italy, the so-called Mezzogiorno. An area which has been important in the past, as a major wheat growing area, and of course, because of the major 'highway' running through it, the Via Appia Traiana, but which has seen most of its population leaving over the last decades, heading for the more populated coastal areas, or abroad. Therefore, you will come across many small, almost empty villages, where the main monuments, like the churches, often seem to be completely out of proportion compared to the actual population.*

*But still this area is an area of great historical interest! The road you are walking for centuries has been the backbone of the Roman road system in southern Italy, and the gateway to its colonies in the southern and eastern Mediterranean. While born as a transport road, for soldiers, merchants and everybody else, in medieval times the road has been used intensively by pilgrims travelling from Rome, the Holy City, to the Middle East, the Holy Land, embarking at Brindisi (or Bari, where this part of the route ends). There are of course still many traces of the Roman civilisation in this area, often almost 'forgotten', due to the lack of interest (and there is just too much 'roman stuff' in Italy...). You'll come across Roman bridges, and milestones, the flagstones of the Via Traiana, now lost in the yellow colour of wheat, and the Romans laid the foundations of many of the cities you'll pass through.*

*And you'll be walking as well on the traces of the Holy Emperor Frederick II, who has lived most of his life in southern Italy (mainly in Puglia), and on the traces of the Normans, dedicated to the cult of St. Michael, which has its main temple in the mountains of the Gargano Promontory. Also traces of this more recent past are still evident in the area and you'll come across many beautiful manor farms that dot the countryside, you'll visit interesting villages like Buonalbergo, the 'protestant' village of Celle di San Vito, the whitewashed village of Troia, with its beautiful cathedral, and then a whole chain of interesting towns in Puglia: Castelluccio, Ortona, Cerignola, Andria, Ruvo di Puglia, Bitonto and finally Bari, perhaps the most underrated big southern Italian town. Along this stretch of the Via Francigena del Sud you'll get a full immersion in the 'Deep South'! You will walk from village to village, most virtually unknown, and definitely off the beaten 'tourist track', a full immersion in the real 'Mezzogiorno', the authentic 'Deep South' of Italy.*



*Please note: this is a moderately difficult tour which is suitable for experienced walkers with a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are along good paths and small rural roads, sometimes on steep terrain – and with little shade! Average walking times: approx. 5 to 7 hours each day.*



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## DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

### Day 1 – Arrival in Benevento

Arrival in Benevento (either on foot or by public transport). Depending on your arrival time, you can settle in your hotel and go for a first visit to this beautiful small town. The city boasts a perfect mix of Roman and Medieval architecture, with the historical centre concentrated in only a few kilometers. You can admire unique buildings and monuments such as the Arch of Trajan, the Longobard church of Santa Sofia, the Roman Theatre and the cathedral.

**Accommodation: Hotel \*\*\* - Benevento**

*Approx. walking time: 1 h. + sightseeing time.*



### Day 2 – From Benevento to Buonalbergo

Today's walk starts from a historically very important point: the Arch of the Emperor Trajan, gateway to the East. From Benevento on you will leave the original Via Appia and head towards Bari and Brindisi along the Via Appia Traiana. Leaving the 'City of Witches', you will walk entirely along the traces of the Roman Via Appia Traiana, although often not much remains to be seen of it... Leaving the urban area, the fertile plain of Campania Felix will soon leave space to the first elevations of the Apennines. Roman bridges, milestones, the flagstones of the Via Traiana lost in the yellow colour of wheat, the manor farms that dot the countryside as far as the eye can see, they will keep you company into Puglia, where the roads seem to head towards the Infinite.

**Accommodation: Boutique hotel 'Terrabuona' - Buonalbergo**

*Total walking distance: 26 km. Approx. walking time: 6,5 h.*

### Day 3 – From Buonalbergo to Celle di San Vito

Today will be a long, rural day, not unlike some hot days along the 'Camino di Santiago': infinite wheat fields and very distant villages. On these small roads and rural paths you will find silence, but little shade... It is possible to cut this stage in two, in order to have more time to visit. In that case you will stay in a nice agriturismo, with a good kitchen and swimming pool in the middle of the rolling hills.

**Accommodation: B&B Le Fontanelle - Celle San Vito**

*Total walking distance: 32 km. Approx. walking time: 9 h.*



N.B. This stage – which in our opinion is too long -and too steep - can be cut into two stages. Staying one night in Castelfranco a Miscano.



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**Day 4 – From Celle di San Vito to Troia**

After the long walks of the last days, today is a relatively short walk, and mostly downhill. Only the first few km. you'll be walking up along the tracks of the Dauni Mountains, until after 2,5 km. you reach the pass and the Adriatic Sea will appear in the distance. From here it's almost only downhill to the beautiful small town of Troia.

Its whitewashed walls give you a very 'eastern' impression, while its Cathedral is a masterpiece of Romanesque art.

**Accommodation: B&B Bora - Troia**

*Total walking distance: 17 km. Approx. walking time: 4-4,5 h. + sightseeing time.*

**Day 5 – From Troia to Castelluccio dei Sauri**

Today is mostly a long descent to the valley of the Cervaro River, which you will reach just before Castelluccio dei Sauri. Only here you'll find small bits of remaining forest, while the whole area has been turned into extensive farmland. You start with a steeper, descent, then climb up a ridge and continue with a long descent through the wheat field dotted with modern windmills. The last few km. bring you up to the village of Castelluccio. The village is of Roman origin, with Byzantine influences from the Middle ages, but most has been destroyed by the 1980 earthquake (and successive reconstruction).

**Accommodation: Hotel Agorà - Castelluccio dei Sauri**

*Total walking distance: 24 km. Approx. walking time: 6 h.*

**Day 6 – From Castelluccio dei Sauri to Ortona**

Today will again be a walk through the fields. Relatively easy, with only a few shorter climbs, while the rest will be mostly downhill. You'll walk through the wheatfields, with several (abandoned) buildings dating back to the 'Riforma agraria', the reform that just after WWII gave pieces of land to landless farmers.

**Accommodation: Hotel \*\*\* - Ortona**

*Total walking distance: 21 km. Approx. walking time: 5-6 h.*

**Day 7 – From Ortona to Stornara**

Your walk through the wheatfields continue today. If you wish you can pay a visit to the archeological area of Herdonia, just South of Ortona. Halfway the day you'll pass the small city of Stornarella, buolt by the Kings of southern Italy in the 17th century to repopulate the 'wheat belt' of southern Italy. At the end of the day you'll arrive in the nice small town of Stornara.

**Accommodation: Hotel \*\*\* - Stornara**

*Total walking distance: 21-23 km. Approx. walking time: 5-6 h.*

**Day 8 – From Stornara to Cerignola**

After a few days in the almost barren, sparsely populated fields you are now finally approaching a more more populated part of Puglia. You'll end today's walk in the nice town of Cerignola, buolt on the ruins of the Roman town Cerina, intimately linked to the Via Appia Traiana. Cerignola is known for its exquisite table olives!

**Accommodation: Villa Pallotta Luxury B&B - Cerignola**

*Total walking distance: 18 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h.*



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### Day 9 – From Cerignola to Canosa di Puglia

After breakfast you start walking through the outskirts of Cerignola. Leaving the city behind you will then find yourself in a landscape of olive groves and vineyards, a pleasant surprise after all the wheatfields of the last days! You'll walk through a gently rolling landscape and pass the Roman bridge over the River Ofanto, before entering the charming small town of Canosa.

**Accommodation: B&B Saffi - Canosa di Puglia**

*Total walking distance: 20 km. Approx. walking time: 5 h.*

### Day 10 – From Canosa di Puglia to Andria

Today you'll walk again in between vineyards and olive groves, through a pleasant rolling landscape. Your final destination for today is the city of Andria, which has a very interesting town centre.

**Accommodation: Foresteria Pellegrino - Andria**

*Total walking distance: 24 km. Approx. walking time: 6-7 h.*



### Day 11 – From Andria through Corato to Ruvo di Puglia

Today you will combine two short stretches of the 'official' Via Francigena nel Sud: from Andria to Corato and from Corato to Ruvo di Puglia. You'll have the possibility to visit three nice small towns: Andria, Corato and Ruvo di Puglia all have beautiful town centres. The landscape is still rolling, with vineyards and olive groves.

**Accommodation: B&B Il Vicolo - Ruvo di Puglia**

*Total walking distance: 25 km. Approx. walking time: 6-7 h.*

### Day 12 – From Ruvo di Puglia to Bitonto

Today your route will bring you from Ruvo to the beautiful city of Bitonto. After a busy section through the outskirts of Ruvo, you will be mostly walking along quiet country roads in the middle of the famous Apulian olive groves. If you want, you can make a short detour to the charming small town of Terlizzi, otherwise it will be a relatively short walk, which allows you plenty of time to visit. The final destination for today is the medieval town (on Roman foundations!) of Bitonto, the heart of which is the beautiful cathedral. You'll settle in a nice B&B in the town centre, and have the time to look around in the old town. The area is also known for the good quality of its table olives, so try some with your aperitivo. There is a good choice of nice restaurants for tonight.

**Accommodation: Palazzo Antica Via Appia - Bitonto**

*Total walking distance: 18 km. Approx. walking time: 4-5 h.*

### Day 13 – From Bitonto to Bari

Today is the last walking day of this third stage of the Via Appia/Francigena del Sud, which will bring you from the town of Bitonto down to the Adriatic Sea at Bari. After a busy section through the outskirts of Bitonto, you will be walking a short stretch along quiet country roads, before entering the outskirts of Bari. You'll pass close to the airport and through residential areas. The last bit is along the coast and brings you right to the historical centre. The City of Bari, although it does not look attractive from the outside, has a beautiful, very interesting historical centre, with as main point of interest the Cathedral of San Nicola.

**Accommodation: Hotel \*\*\*/ B&B - Bari**

*Total walking distance: 15-25 km. (several possible options). Approx. walking time: 4-7 h.*



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**Day 14 – Departure**

End of the tour. From Bari you can take the train back to Rome (or travel on to Naples).

We recommend an extra night in beautiful Bari, worth a prolonged visit. And of course the continuation of the walk to Brindisi is very much recommended!

## *The Via Appia and the 'Via Francigene' in southern Italy*

### **From Rome to the Holy Land – walking through the authentic southern Italy**

Of course the pilgrims used mostly the roads which were already there: the **Roman roads** such as the **Via Appia** and the **Via Appia Traiana**, which follow the most obvious passes and the most 'logical' routes from Rome to Brindisi and which were in place already since a 1000 years at the time of the pilgrimages.

Other routes used by the pilgrims refer to the Holy Emperor Frederick II, who has lived a big part of his life in southern Italy (mainly in Puglia), and to the cult of St. Michael, which has its main temple in the mountains of the Gargano Promontory. Therefore, even more than in northern Italy there is not such a thing as one 'Via Francigena', there are many different possible routes. For this reason we refer to the 'Vie Francigene' (which is the plural form in Italian), rather than 'the' Via Francigena.

### **Walking the original route or a full immersion in local landscape & culture?**

As written, the old Roman roads obviously followed the most 'logical' route, and the easiest passages. And that is basically the main problem with the 'original routes': often the roads have been further transformed over the centuries, and are nowadays major roads of national importance (*'strade statali'*), often even 4-lane highways. For that reason, also the 'official' **Via Francigena nel Sud** sometimes deviates from the original track. However, sometimes some busier sections can't be avoided, as a real network of footpaths is not in place (yet) in many of the areas you will walk through.



***N.B.** Please note that for this section of the tour we have preferred to stay almost exclusively on the 'official' route of the southern Via Francigena, because this is one of the very few paths in this area of which the maintenance can be assured !! However, on request, we can offer several 'variations' of this 'official tour'.*



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## TOUR DETAILS

### ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in hand-picked accommodations, usually nice, characteristic family-run hotels (generally 3-star level) or Bed & Breakfasts and beautiful *agriturismo*'s. All rooms have en-suite facilities.

You will be free to make your own dinner arrangements. Your host can give you good tips (or prepare something).

A packed lunch can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders or picnic supplies can be purchased in the villages along the road. On some occasions you have the option to have your lunch in a restaurant along the way.

### INCLUDED

- 13 nights accommodation – BB/HB
- 1 (2) night(s) in Benevento – BB
- 1 night in Buonalbergo – BB
- 1 night in Castelfranco a Miscano (optional)
- 1 night in Celle San Vito – HB
- 1 night in Troia – BB
- 1 night in Castelluccio dei Sauri – BB
- 1 night in Ortona – BB
- 1 night in Stornara – BB
- 1 night in Cerignola – BB
- 1 night in Canosa – BB
- 1 night in Andria – BB
- 1 night in Ruvo di Puglia – BB
- 1 night in Bitonto – BB
- 1 (2) night(s) in Bari – BB
- Route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1: 25.000 scale or better
- GPX-tracks
- 24/7 h. assistance

### NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Luggage transport (can be arranged at an extra cost)
- Optional private transfers
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Items of personal nature
- Tips



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## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

**Arrival:** The tour starts in BENEVENTO linked by a frequent bus service to Rome and Naples, which both have an international airport. There are also frequent trains to other cities in Italy.

**Departure:** The tour ends after breakfast in BARI, the capital of Puglia, which has an international airport and is linked by a frequent train service to Rome and Naples.

## LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

**Moderate (3):** Mostly moderately easy walks, with some long stages, involving some steep uphill walking, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On some days extensions or shortcuts are possible.

**Fitness:** High standard of fitness is necessary: you should be able to walk for up to 7 hours a day in the hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

*N.B. During summer the difficulty of this tour definitely increases due to the heat. We therefore advise against booking this tour during the period between about 14<sup>th</sup> July and 20<sup>th</sup> August.*

## FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

**Footpaths:** Most paths are relatively well maintained; you'll follow most of the time the official route of the Via Francigena del Sud, relatively well maintained. A large part of the route goes along quiet rural roads or so-called *strade bianche* (unsurfaced roads), easy to follow and unlikely to get overgrown.

**Waymarking:** A large part of the route is waymarked with the signage of the 'Via Francigena', but on some occasions we have found more interesting routes than those actually waymarked; therefore, you should follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these you will always be able to find your route.



## TOUR VARIATIONS

It is possible to make use of the train a few times, avoiding some less interesting stretches. Also is it possible to cut some (too!) long stretches of the 'official' route in two, to make the route feasible for good walkers, without becoming too strenuous. And more importantly, leave some time to visit the places 'touched' along the route.

Halfway the tour the tour can be extended with an extra 'loop' along the '**Via Micaelica**', from Troia onto the Gargano Peninsula, a stunning area, where you can visit Italy's most important church dedicated to San Michele (St. Michael).

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