



Puglia, Basilicata & Calabria

Italy's deep south is another country, a long way from the urbane mores of the north. It's a jumble of coastal dwellers, mountain people, with Greek, Spanish and Turkish influences and fierce local pride. Olive oil, grapes, tomatoes, aubergines, artichokes, peppers, salami, fungi, olives and fresh seafood strain its table. A history of subjugation, feudalism and immigration colours its outlook. Malarial swamplands and raids forced the population inland, creating dramatic hilltop villages and towns. There are plenty of reminders of unrelenting poverty and there's plenty to regret – such as the stark suburban sprawl of Brindisi and most Calabrian towns, and industrial development around Potenza and Taranto. In the 1950s a governmental programme failed to alleviate poverty and led to a dependency on government support.

But Puglia is a rural breadbasket, skirted by 800km of coast, with limestone cliffs, endless olive groves and tangled forests interspersing sandy beaches. It's the latest darling of the travel press, and is just starting to be discovered by foreign tourists, who are buying up its rotund *trullo* houses, as round as beehives. Basilicata, Italy's smallest region, is a crush of mountains and rolling hills, with a dazzling stretch of coast to rival Amalfi's. Calabria, Italy's wildest region, has some of the country's finest beaches and dizzying, huge mountainscapes.

Southern Italy is authentic and mysterious, and here you can have a real adventure. To get the best out of the south, your own transport is an advantage and often essential.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Roam around the rural landscape of the Valle d'Itria while staying in **Trulli country** (p694) in Puglia
- Marvel at Puglia's barmy baroque architecture in **Lecce** (p702)
- Immerse yourself in the beauty of the **Promontorio del Gargano** (opposite)
- Explore the extraordinary *sassi* (stone houses) of **Matera** (p715) in Basilicata by day and take an eerie walk at night
- Discover Italy's best kept secret in **Maratea** (p712), Basilicata's answer to the Amalfi Coast
- Vanish into the vast hills of both **La Sila** (p727) in Calabria, and the **Parco Nazionale del Pollino** (p714 and p722) in Basilicata and Calabria



■ POPULATION: Puglia 4.07 million;
Basilicata 596,500; Calabria 2.01 million

■ AREA: Puglia 19,348 sq km;
Basilicata 9992 sq km; Calabria 15,080 sq km

PUGLIA

Puglia is sun-bleached landscapes, seascapes and silver olive groves; hilltop and coastal towns; factories and power stations; *taranta* (mesmerising local folk music); fields polka-dotted with spring flowers; cigarette- and people-smuggling; elderly men on benches and bicycles; elderly women on string chairs outside their houses; summer carnivals; immigrants arriving by boat; and dialects that change from town to town.

Italy's heel has the country's longest coastline – 800km of it. Two seas meet here: the Adriatic to the east and the Ionian to the south. It's legendary for its foodstuffs, in a land where food is all-important. The region looks out to sea and bears the marks of many invading overseas visitors: the Normans, the Spanish, the Turks, the Swabians and the Greeks. Puglia feels authentic – in some places it's rare to hear a foreign voice. In July and August it becomes a huge party, with thousands of Italian tourists heading down here for their annual break.

They're here to bask on some of Italy's loveliest coastline, from the dramatic Promontorio del Gargano to the white-sand beaches of the Penisola Salentina. Geologically speaking the region resembles Croatia – the land mass to which it was once joined – rather than the rest of Italy. The coast alternates between glittering limestone precipices and long beaches edged by waters veering between emerald-green and dusky powder blue.

There are festivals here throughout the year, but fabulous events, concerts (often *taranta*), and *sagre* (festivals, usually involving food) take place nightly in July and August. Buy the magazine *QuiSalento* (€2.50) from newspaper kiosks to see what's on in the Salento (the southeastern part of Puglia, encompassing Lecce, Brindisi and Taranto; aka Penisola Salentina), or check the website www.quisalento.it.

History

At times Puglia feels Greek, and certainly its history is partially Greek: the Greeks founded a string of settlements along the Ionian coast in the 8th century BC. Their major city was Taras (Taranto), settled by Spartan exiles who dominated until they were defeated by the

Romans in 272 BC. Fewer than 100 years later, in 190 BC, the Romans completed Via Appia, the road from Rome to the south.

The long coastline made the region ripe for conquest. The Normans left their fine Romanesque churches, the Swabians their fortifications, and the Spanish bold baroque buildings. A form of Greek dialect (Griko) is still spoken in some towns southeast of Lecce. No-one, however, knows exactly the origins of the strange 16th-century, conical-roofed stone houses, the *trulli*, unique to Puglia.

Apart from invaders and pirates, malaria was long the greatest scourge of the south, forcing many towns to build away from the coast and into the hills. It only came under control after WWII.

After Mussolini's seizure of power in 1922 following WWI, the south became the front-line in his 'Battle for Wheat'. This initiative was aimed at making Italy self-sufficient when it came to food, following the sanctions imposed on the country after its conquest of Ethiopia – Puglia is now covered in wheat fields, olive groves and fruit arbours. In recent years immigrants have increasingly supplied much of the agricultural workforce, and there have been scandals about their treatment in the tomato farms around Foggia.

PROMONTORIO DEL GARGANO

The coast surrounding this enchanting bulge of land refracts a pinky, pearly light. The sea softens from intense to dusty blue as evening comes. It's one of Italy's most beautiful areas, encompassing white limestone cliffs, calcareous grottoes, sparkling sea, ancient forests, and tangled, fragrant maquis. Once connected to what is now Dalmatia, the 'spur' of the Italian boot has more in common with the land mass across the sea than with the rest of Italy. Creeping urbanisation was halted in 1991 by the creation of the **Parco Nazionale del Gargano**. Aside from its magnificent display of flora and the primeval forests of Quarto, Spigno and Umbra, the park takes in miracle town San Giovanni Rotonda (see p681) and the historic pilgrimage destination of Monte Sant'Angelo. Seaside towns Vieste and Peschici are popular summer destinations.

Along the coast you'll spot strange cat's-cradle wood-and-rope arrangements. These are *trabucchi*, structures built by fishermen from where they cast their nets, and are unique to the area.

PUGLIA ON YOUR PLATE

Puglia is famous for its food and its cuisine, which comes from *cucina povera* – cooking for the poor: think of pasta made without eggs and dishes prepared with wild greens gathered from the fields.

Most of Italy's fish is caught off the Puglian coast, 80% of Europe's pasta is produced here and 80% of Italy's olive oil originates in Puglia and Calabria. Tomatoes, broccoli, chicory, fennel, figs, melons, cherries and grapes are all plentiful in season and taste better than anywhere else. Almonds, grown near Ruvo di Puglia, are packed into many traditional cakes and pastries, which used to be eaten only by the privileged.

Like their Greek forbears, the Pugliese eat *agnello* (lamb) and *capretto* (kid). *Cavallo* (horse) has only recently galloped to the table. Meat is usually roasted or grilled with aromatic herbs or served in tomato-based sauces.

Raw fish (such as anchovies or baby squid) are marinated in olive oil and lemon juice. *Cozze* (mussels) are prepared in multitudinous ways, with garlic and breadcrumbs, or as *riso cozze patate*, baked with rice and potatoes – every area has its variations on this dish.

Bread and pasta are close to the Pugliese heart, with per capita consumption at least double that of the USA. You'll find *orecchiette* (small ear-shaped pasta, often accompanied by a small rod-shaped variety, called *strascinati* or *cavatelli*), served with broccoli (a Bari tradition) or *ragù* (ragout), often topped by the pungent local cheese *ricotta forte*.

Previously known for quantity rather than quality, Pugliese wines are now developing apace. The best are produced on the Penisola Salentina (the Salice Salentino is one of the finest reds), in the *trulli* (conical houses) area around Locorotondo (famous for its white wine), around Cisternino (home of the fashionable heavy red Primitivo) and in the plains around Foggia and Lucera.

The main park office, **Ente Parco Nazionale del Gargano** (☎ 0884 56 89 11; www.parcogargano.it in Italian; Via Abate 121; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Mon-Wed), is in Monte Sant'Angelo. On its website is a long list of official park guides.

Walks and excursions are organised by **Soc Cooperative Ecogargano** (☎ 0884 56 54 44) based in Monte Sant'Angelo, and **Explora Gargano** (☎ 0884 70 22 37; www.exploragargano.it) in Vieste, which runs jeep, quad-bike, mountain-bike and walking tours.

Foresta Umbra

The 'Forest of Shadows' is the Gargano's enchanted interior – tall, epic trees, with picnic spots dotted throughout, all bathed in dappled light. It's the last remnant of Puglia's ancient forests: Aleppo pines, oaks and beech trees shade the mountainous terrain. More than 65 different types of orchid have been discovered here. Walkers and mountain bikers will find plenty of well-marked trails within the forest's 5790 sq km.

At the Villaggio Umbra, in the middle of the forest, the Corpo Forestale dello Stato (CFS; State Forestry Department) runs a visitors centre housing a small **museum and nature centre** (☎ 0884 8 80 55; admission €2; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep).

Specialist tour operators organise excursions. Based in Foggia, **Blue Animation Team** (☎ 0881 70 86 66; www.blueanimationteam.it in Italian; Via Zara 6) leads walks and mountain-bike rides from June to September. From Vieste, **Agenzia SOL** (☎ 0884 70 15 58; www.solvieste.it; Via Trepiccioni 5) runs trekking, biking and jeep excursions in the Foresta Umbra, and boat trips around Vieste and to the Isole Tremiti.

La Chiesa delle More (☎ 330 54 37 66; www.lachiusadellemore.it; Vallo dello Schiaffo; B&B per person €55-90; ☎ May-Aug; P ☎ ☎) offers an escape from the cramped coast. An attractive stone-built *agriturismo* (farm-stay accommodation), only 1.5km from Peschici, it's set in a huge olive grove, and you can dine on home-grown produce and enjoy panoramic views from your poolside lounge.

Manfredonia

pop 57,400

A bustling port on a wide sandy beach, Manfredonia was founded by – who else? – the Swabian king Manfred (1231–66), Frederick II's illegitimate son. The centre is a pleasant grid, but it's an industrial rather than a tourist centre.

Overlooking the sea, its impressive **castle** (☎ 0884 58 78 38; Corso Manfredi; admission €2.50;

(☎ 8.30am-7.30pm, closed 1st & last Mon of month) was begun by Manfred and completed by Charles of Anjou. The **Museo Archeologico Nazionale del Gargano** within displays local finds, including ancient carved grave slabs.

About 2km south of town is **Siponto**, an important port from Roman to medieval times. Following problems with earthquakes and malaria, it was then abandoned in favour of Manfredonia. Of particular interest here is the middle-of-nowhere 11th-century Romanesque **Chiesa di Santa Maria di Siponto**, with Islamic architectural borrowings.

On the seafront, **Hotel Gargano** (☎ 0884 58 76 21; www.hotelgargano.net; Viale Beccarini 2; s/d €55/84; ☎) is bright, modern(ish) and airy. It boasts four stars but feels closer to three. The rooms have little sea-facing balconies.

Ristorante Coppolarossa (☎ 0884 58 25 22; Via dei Celestini 13; meals €25-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) is a jovial family-run restaurant that's highly recommended. Specialising in seafood, it grills, fries and boils with panache.

For excellent local seafood specialties try **Trattoria Il Baraccio** (☎ 0884 55 89 41; Corso Roma 38; meals €30; ☎ lunch Fri-Wed), a traditional trattoria that's charming and small, and almost Art Deco in design.

Robustella (☎ 0884 51 38 33; Corso Manfredi 56; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4-9pm) is a small, crammed ceramics shop that offers some jazzy variations on traditional Pugliese pottery.

Regular trains, and both **SITA** (☎ 0881 77 31 17; www.sitabus.it in Italian) and **Ferrovie del Gargano** (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com in Italian) buses regularly go to Foggia from here (€1.90, one hour). SITA has buses daily to Vieste (€3.40, two hours, four daily). SITA also runs frequent daily buses to Monte Sant'Angelo (€1.30, 45 minutes). Get tickets and timetable information from Bar Impero on Piazza Marconi, from where all services leave. You can also take a daily **ferry** (☎ 0884 58 28 88) to the Isole Tremiti from June to September (€23.10; 1¼ hours).

Monte Sant'Angelo

pop 13,800 / elev 796m

One of Europe's most important pilgrimage sites, this isolated mountain-top has an extraordinary atmosphere, apparent even as you wind up the looping mountain road. Pilgrims have been coming here for centuries; so have the hustlers, pushing everything from religious kitsch to parking spaces.

The object of devotion is the Santuario di San Michele. Here, in AD 490, St Michael the Archangel is said to have appeared in a grotto to the Bishop of Siponto. He left behind his scarlet cloak and instructions not to consecrate the site as he had already done so.

During the Middle Ages, the sanctuary marked the end of the Route of the Angel, which began in Normandy and passed through Rome. In 999 the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III made a pilgrimage to the sanctuary to pray that prophecies about the end of the world in the year 1000 would not be fulfilled – his prayers were answered, the world staggered on and the sanctuary's fame grew.

SIGHTS

Look out for 17th-century pilgrims' graffiti as you descend the steps to the **Santuario di San Michele** (admission free; ☎ 7.30am-7.30pm Jul-Sep, 7.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm Apr-Jun & Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar). St Michael is said to have left a footprint in stone inside the grotto, so it became customary for pilgrims to carve outlines of their feet and hands.

Etched Byzantine bronze and silver doors, cast in Constantinople in 1076, open into the grotto itself. Inside, a 16th-century statue of the archangel covers the site of St Michael's footprint.

Once outside, descend the short flight of steps opposite the sanctuary to the **Tomba di Rotari** (admission €0.60; ☎ 9.40am-1pm & 3-7.30pm Apr-Oct) – not a tomb, but a 12th-century baptistry with a deep sunken basin for total immersion. You enter the baptistry through the façade of the **Chiesa di San Pietro**, with its intricate rose window – all that remains of the church, destroyed by a 19th-century earthquake. The Romanesque portal of the adjacent 11th-century **Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore** has some fine bas-reliefs.

The town's serpentine alleys and jumbled houses are perfect for a little aimless ambling. Heading up to the highest point you'll reach a rugged, bijou Norman **castle** (admission €1.80; ☎ 8am-7pm Jul & Aug, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Sep-Jun) with Swabian and Aragonese additions and lovely views. Head for the **belvedere** for more sweeping views.

SLEEPING & EATING

Casa di Pellegrino (☎ 0884 56 23 96; s/d €33/45) The pilgrims' lodge is an institutional but intriguing place, with around 50 rooms above the

sanctuary. The atmosphere veers somewhere between a private hospital and *The Shining*, but rooms are comfortable and many have views. There's an 11pm curfew and a 9.30am check-out.

Hotel Michael (☎ 0884 56 55 19; www.hotelmichael.com; s/d €45/75) A small hotel with shuttered windows on the main street, close to the sanctuary, this traditional place has spacious rooms with extremely pink bedspreads. Ask for a room with a view.

Hotel Sant'Angelo (☎ 0884 56 55 36; www.hotel.santangelo.com; Via Pulsano; s €42-52, d €62-73; P) Sant'Angelo and its adjoining Rotary Hotel are about 1km out of town, down the winding mountain approach. Rooms have balconies and are airy, plain and pleasant, with spectacular views over the rock-strewn landscape.

Taverna Li Jalantuómene (☎ 0884 56 54 84; Piazza de Galganis 5; meals €40; ☎ Wed-Mon Feb-Dec) This renowned restaurant serves excellent fare, accompanied by a long but select wine list, in picturesque surroundings. In summer, tables spill into the piazza.

Don't leave town without tasting local speciality *ostie ripiene* (or 'stuffed Hosts') –

wafers resembling the Hosts used at Mass, filled with caramelised almonds.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Monte Sant'Angelo can be accessed by **SITA** (☎ 0881 77 31 17; www.sitabus.it in Italian) buses from Foggia (€2.70, 1½ hours, three daily), Manfredonia (€1.30, 45 minutes, frequent) and Vieste (€4, two hours, five daily). Buy your tickets from Bar Esperia next to the sanctuary.

Vieste

pop 13,600

Vieste is a small, steep, cobbled town, spilling down the hillside above the sea. It's the Gargano capital and sits above the area's most spectacular beach, a gleaming wide strip backed by sheer white cliffs and overshadowed by the towering Scoglio di Pizzomunno, a rock monolith. It's packed in summer and almost closed in the low season.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

From Piazzale Manzoni, where intercity buses terminate, a 10-minute walk east along Viale XXIV Maggio, which becomes Corso Fazzini,

WHO IS THE GENIAL MONK?

The smiling, bearded man who pops up on walls everywhere is Padre Pio (1887–1968), who on 16 June 2002 took his place in the pantheon before an estimated 300,000 devotees, the 457th saint to be canonised by Pope John Paul II.

The Vatican had undergone a remarkable volte-face. Suspicious of his reputation, it had twice investigated Padre Pio for fraud, bugged his confessional and even banned him from saying Mass for 10 years. But this was all later forgiven and forgotten, in an appropriately Christian way.

Miracles were needed to support the canonization: first was an Italian woman who had recovered from a burst lymph vessel after praying to Padre Pio. Then a seven-year-old boy recovered from meningitis in 2000 after seeing a vision of him.

Padre Pio found himself with stigmata in around 1911. The ailing Capuchin priest arrived in **San Giovanni Rotondo**, then a tiny, isolated medieval village, in 1916. As Pio's fame grew, the town too underwent a miraculous transformation. These days, it's a mass of functional hotels and restaurants catering to eight million pilgrims a year. It's all overlooked by the palatial Home for the Relief of Suffering, one of Italy's premier hospitals (established by Pio in 1947).

The **Convent of the Minor Capuchin Friars** (☎ 0882 41 71; www.conventopadrepio.com) includes Padre Pio's **cell** (☎ 7.30am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Jun-Aug, to 6pm Sep-May), a simple room containing mementoes such as his bloodstained socks. The **old church** (☎ 5.30am-6.30pm), where he used to say Mass, dates from the 16th century. The spectacular **new church** (☎ 5.30-7.15pm), designed by Genovese Renzo Piano (who also designed Paris' Pompidou Centre), resembles a huge futuristic seashell, with an interior of boney vaulting. Inside holds 7200 (outside has a capacity for 30,000) but the design, owing more to a concert hall than a cathedral, is such that none of the seated congregation will feel distant. Padre Pio's body now lies in the geometric perfection of the semicircular crypt.

SITA buses run daily from San Giovanni Rotondo to Monte Sant'Angelo (above) and also serve Manfredonia and Foggia (€2.70).

brings you into the old town and the Giardino Pubblico Marina Piccola's attractive promenade.

Post office (Via 4 Novembre 1)

Tourist office (☎ 0884 70 88 06; Piazza Kennedy; ☎ 8am-1.30pm Mon-Fri & 4-7pm Tue-Thu Oct-Apr, 8am-1.30pm & 3-9pm Mon-Sat May-Sep)

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Vieste is about beaches, eating and drinking. However, there are some sights in its winding medieval streets. Most gruesome is the **Chianca Amara** (Bitter Stone; Via Cimaglia), where thousands were beheaded when Turks sacked Vieste in the 16th century. Nearby is a **castle** built by Frederick II. It's occupied by the military and closed to the public, though the tourist office can organise guided tours. Built by the Normans on the ruins of a Vesta temple, the **cathedral** (Via Duomo) is in Puglian-Romanesque style, and was rebuilt in 1800.

At the port, **Centro Ormeggi e Sub** (☎ 0884 70 79 83; ☎ May-Sep) offers diving courses and rents out sailing boats and motorboats.

From May to September fast boats zoom to the Isole Tremiti (p684).

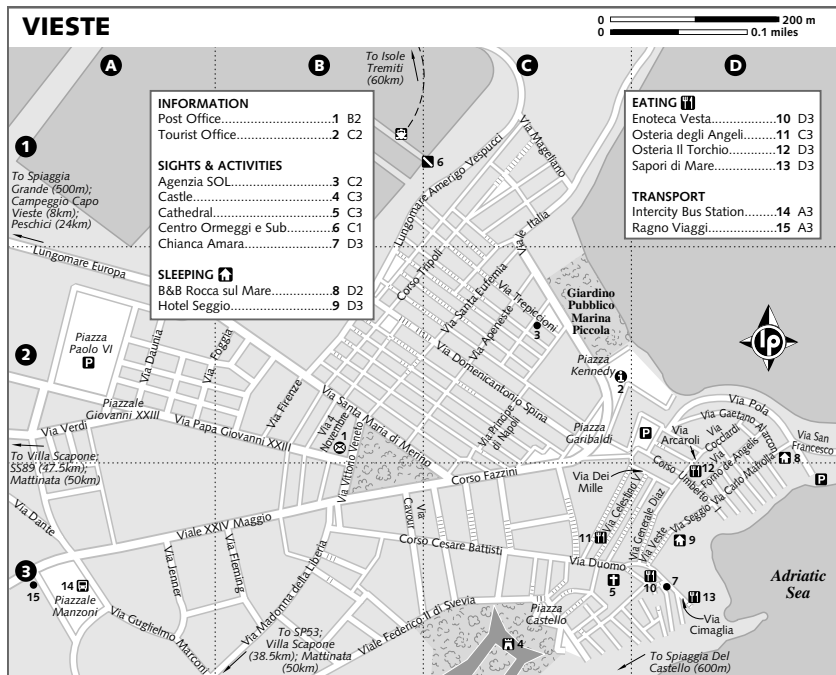
The best beaches, such as Cala San Felice and Cala Sanguinaria, are south of Vieste. Spiaggia del Castello is easily accessible, only 1km south, so private transport is not essential. Other good beaches lie north, towards Peschici, particularly in the area known as La Salata.

For a break from the beach, take a tour with **Agenzia SOL** (☎ 0884 70 15 58; www.solvieste.it; Via Trepiccioni 5), which arranges walking and cycling in the Foresta Umbra, and rents out mountain bikes and cars.

SLEEPING

Most of Vieste's hotels and *pensioni* are scattered along the beachfront roads north and south of town. Camp sites (as many as 80) line the coast, particularly to the south.

Campeggio Capo Vieste (☎ 0884 70 63 26; www.hotelaranci.it; Litoranea Vieste-Peschici Km8; per person €3.50-11, tent €6.50-15, car €3-5; ☎ Mar-Oct) This woodshaded camp site is right by a sandy beach at La Salata, around 8km from Vieste, and is accessible by bus. Tons of activities are available, including tennis and a sailing school. It also has bungalow accommodation (four-person



bungalow €42 to €136, six-person bungalow €54 to €160).

Villa Rocca sul Mare (☎ 0884 70 27 19; www.roccasulmare.it; Via Carlo Mafrolla 32; d €60-120) In a former convent in the old quarter, this place has charm, with large, plain, high-ceilinged rooms, some busy tilework and steep staircases. Some rooms open onto the terrace, which has great views.

Villa Scapone (☎ 0884 55 92 84; www.villascapone.it; Litoranea Mattinata-Vieste Km 11.5; d €55-110; ☞ Apr-Oct; 📍 📍 📍) An attractive villa fantastically sited on the cliffs between Mattinata and Vieste. The hotel terraces and sundecks tumble seawards and all 24 elegant rooms have stunning sea views and balconies with hammocks. A secluded sliver of beach and sea can be reached through the rocks.

Hotel Seggio (☎ 0884 70 81 23; www.hotelseggio.it; Via Veste 7; d €75-140; ☞ Apr-Oct; 📍 📍 📍) A lemon-yellow *palazzo* (mansion) in the town's historic centre, this has a seafront location and steps that spiral down to its dramatically set pool and sunbathing terrace. The rooms are small and plain but it's family-run and has a warm Italian feel.

EATING

Osteria Il Torchio (☎ 0884 70 71 58; Via Arcaroli 8; meals €20; ☞ Mar-Oct) Join a young crowd on the benches at this *osteria* (simple trattoria-style restaurant) till late; there's some surprisingly fine food, including good pasta dishes.

Osteria degli Angeli (☎ 0884 70 11 12; Via Celestino V 50; meals €20; ☞ late May-Sep) Near the cathedral, tucked away on an arched alley, is this friendly restaurant offering great cooking. Try the *trocicoli dell'angeli* (pasta with prawns).

Sapori di Mare (☎ 0884 70 79 79; Via Judeca 30; meals €25; ☞ Jun-Sep) In the old town, this has a wonderful glass-covered terrace with glorious views – a great panoramic spot for superb seafood or a cool drink.

Enoteca Vesta (☎ 0884 70 64 11; Via Duomo 14; meals €25) If your wine is as important as your food then this is your restaurant, housed in a cool, vaulted cave, where you can savour a magnificent selection of Puglian wines.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Vieste's port is to the north, about a five-minute walk from the tourist office. In summer several companies, including **Tirrenia di Navigazione** (☎ 0884 70 85 01) head to the Isole Tremiti from here. Tickets can be bought

portside, and there are several boats daily from June to September (€15.80, 1½ hours).

Many companies also offer tours of the caves which pock the Gargano coast – a three-hour tour costs around €10.

SITA (☎ 0881 77 31 17; www.sitabus.it in Italian) buses run between Vieste and Foggia (€4.90, 2½ hours, four daily) via Manfredonia, and between Vieste and Monte Sant'Angelo (€4), while **Ferrovie del Gargano** (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com in Italian) services go to Peschici (€1.80, 35 minutes, 11 daily) and other towns on the promontory. Buses terminate at Piazzale Manzoni in Vieste and timetables are posted outside **Ragno Viaggi** (☎ 0884 70 15 28). Services are scarce at weekends.

Agenzia SOL (see opposite) also sells bus and boat tickets.

Peschici

pop 4300

Above a jump-in-me turquoise sea and an attractive beach, Peschici clings prettily to the hilly, wooded coastline. It's a whitewashed resort area, with a tight-knit old walled town. It gets crammed in summer, so book well in advance. Boats zip across to the Isole Tremiti from April to September.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The medieval town occupies the cliff-top, while the newer parts extend inland and around the bay. In winter months, buses terminate beside Chiesa di San Antonio. In other months, the terminal is beside the sportsground, uphill from the main street, Corso Garibaldi. Turn right into the *corso* (main street) and walk straight to reach the old town.

There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 0884 96 44 25; Corso Garibaldi 57; ☞ 10.30am-12.30pm & 5.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat).

SLEEPING & EATING

Peschici has several hotels and *pensioni*, and camp sites line the coast.

Baia San Nicola (☎ /fax 0884 96 42 31; www.baiasannicola.it; adult €5.60-9.50, tent €5.50-8.60, car €3.10-5; ☞ mid-May-mid-Oct) The best camp site in the area, 2km south of Peschici towards Vieste, Baia San Nicola is on a pine-shaded beach, and offers camping, bungalows, apartments and myriad amenities.

our pick **Locanda al Castello** (☎ 0884 96 40 38; Piazza Castello 29; s €35-70, d €75-100; 📍 📍) Staying here is like entering a large, welcoming

family home. By the cliffs, with fantastic views, it's definitely the pick of the old quarter. It also runs a decent restaurant (meals €18), with hearty home-cooking – the bruschetta is magnificent – and a neighbouring pizzeria (evenings only).

Hotel Timiana (☎ /fax 0884 96 43 21; Viale Libeta 73; r per person €80-90; ☞ mid-Apr–mid-Sep; ♿ ♿ ♿) In its own pine-shaded grounds 800m from the sea, small-scale Timiana is an old-style shuttered building with cool white rooms ideal for an afternoon siesta. It offers a free shuttle to the beach and serves delicious local dishes.

La Collinetta (☎ 0884 96 41 51; Madonna di Loreto; meals €25; ☞ Apr–Sep) On the road towards Vieste, this is a smashing restaurant serving fresh fish, with a sunny terrace overlooking the pine trees, olive groves and azure coast.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ferrovie del Gargano (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com in Italian) buses run between Peschici and Vieste (€1.80, 35 minutes, 11 daily), and Peschici and San Severo (2¾ hours, one daily Monday to Friday). Both routes have connections through to Foggia. There are fewer services at weekends. From April to September, daily boats serve the Isole Tremiti (adult/child €25/15, one to 1½ hours). For boat tickets and information, try the following:

MS&G Società di Navigazione (☎ 0884 96 27 32; Corso Umberto I 20)

Navigare SRL (☎ 0884 96 42 34; Corso Umberto I)

Lago Lesina & Lago Varano

Huge lagoons run along the Adriatic coast north of Peschici. An 800m-wide dune separates the 20km-long Lago Lesina from the sea, while Lago Varano is 10km long and even more isolated. There are some lovely walks around the perimeters, and both lakes are prime bird-watching territory. Contact the **Lesina visitor centre** (☎ 0882 99 27 27) for details about the area, and its walks and biking trails. You'll need your own transport to reach the lagoons.

ISOLE TREMITI

pop 400

This beautiful archipelago of three islands, 36km offshore, makes for a splendid trip. The hour-long boat ride takes you to a world of raggedy cliffs, sandy coves and thick pine woods, surrounded by the glittering dark-blue sea.

Unfortunately the islands are no secret, and in July and August some 100,000 holiday-makers descend on the archipelago, somewhat masking the islands' natural beauty and tranquillity. In the low season they are magical, if oddly deserted. Most tourist facilities close down, and the few permanent residents resume their quiet and isolated lives.

The islands' accommodation and facilities are on San Domino, the largest and lushest island, which was formerly used to grow crops. It's ringed by alternating sandy beaches and limestone cliffs, while the inland is covered in thick maquis flecked with rosemary and foxgloves. The centre harbours a nondescript small town with several hotels.

Easily defended, the small San Nicola island was always the administrative centre of the Isole Tremiti – a castlelike cluster of medieval buildings rises up from the rocks. The third island, Capraia, is uninhabited.

Most boats arrive at San Domino. Small boats regularly make the brief crossing to San Nicola (€5 return) in high season – from October to March a single boat makes the trip after meeting the boat from the mainland.

Sights & Activities

Head to **San Domino** for walks, grottoes and coves. It has a pristine, marvellous coastline, and the islands' only sandy beach, **Cala delle Arene**. There are several small coves where you can swim in amazingly clear waters. You can also take a boat trip (€10 from the port) around the island to explore the grottoes: the largest, **Grotta del Bue Marino**, is 46m long. A tour around all three islands costs €16. Diving in the translucent sea is another option, with **Blue Space** (☎ 0882 46 32 29; www.tremitidiving.com; Villaggio San Domino).

There's an undemanding but enchanting walking track around the island, starting at the far end of the village. Alternatively, you could hire a bicycle from **Jimmy Bike** (☎ 3388970909) at Piazzetta San Domino.

Medieval buildings thrust out of **San Nicola's** rocky shores, the same pale-sand colour as the barren cliffs. In 1010 Benedictine monks founded the **Abbazia e Chiesa di Santa Maria** here, and for the next 700 years the islands were ruled by a series of abbots who accumulated great wealth. Although the church retains a weather-worn Renaissance portal and a fine 11th-century floor mosaic, its other treasures have been stolen or destroyed throughout its

troubled history. The only exceptions are a painted wooden Byzantine crucifix brought to the island in AD 747 and a black Madonna, probably transported here from Constantinople in the Middle Ages.

The third of the Isole Tremiti, **Capraia**, is uninhabited. Birdlife is plentiful, with impressive flocks of seagulls. There is no organised transport, but you can negotiate a trip with a local fisherman.

Sleeping & Eating

In summer you'll need to book well ahead. In the low season, phone to check that your chosen hotel is open. In the high season many hotels insist on full board.

Pensione Ristorante-Bar Belvedere (☎ 0882 46 32 82; Via Garibaldi 6, San Domino; low season d €50-140) Across the road from Gabbiano, above a café that's the only eatery open in the low season, this guesthouse has plain, pretty rooms with tiled floors and sea views.

Hotel Gabbiano (☎ 0882 46 34 10; www.hotel-gabbiano.com; Piazza Belvedere, San Domino; per person half board €55-105, full board €65-115) This San Domino hotel, run for more than 30 years by a Neapolitan family, has smart pastel-coloured rooms with balconies overlooking San Nicola and the sea. Its renowned terrace restaurant with similarly splendid views offers straight-from-the-sea fish.

Il Pirata (☎ 0882 46 34 09; Cala delle Arene, San Domino; ☞ Apr-Oct) A class act with a terrace on the beach, this specialises in – what else – fresh fish.

Getting There & Away

Boats for the Isole Tremiti depart from several points on the Italian mainland: Manfredonia, Vieste and Peschici in summer (see p683; and opposite), and Termoli in nearby Molise year-round (see p616).

Alternatively, take a helicopter from Foggia (€50, 20 minutes, two daily) courtesy of **Alidaunia** (☎ 0881 61 96 96).

FOGGIA

pop 155,000

Foggia's name derives from its famous *fovea* (grain stores). Entering Puglia from the north you descend from Molise's lush pastures to the sun-baked flatness of the Tavoliere plain, a golden wheat-producing expanse – though tomatoes are increasingly creeping into the picture – and into Foggia.

Frederick II (1194–1250) loved Foggia, and his heart was kept here in a casket until the massive earthquake of 1731 destroyed the town and most things in it. More destruction came during WWII as strategic airbases nearby became prime bomb targets. The damaged buildings were replaced by some gruesome 1960s architecture, though a kernel of medieval city remains in the centre.

Besides the 12th-century cathedral, there's little to detain you here, though Troia and Lucera, nearby, are worth a visit.

Orientation & Information

Train and bus stations face Piazza Vittorio Veneto, on the town's northern rim. Viale XXIV Maggio – with hotels, restaurants and shops – leads south into Piazza Cavour. From Piazza Cavour, Via Lanza leads to Corso Vittorio Emanuele II and what remains of the old quarter. To reach the **tourist office** (☎ 0881 72 31 41; 1st fl, Via Senatore Emilio Perrone 17; ☞ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Tue & Thu) head south along Corso P Giannone from Piazza Cavour. Take the third left, turning into Via Cirillo and go straight on until Piazzale Puglia – Via Perrone is on your right.

Sights

The 12th-century Romanesque **cathedral** (☎ 0881 77 34 82; ☞ 7am-12.30pm & 5-8pm), off Corso Vittorio Emanuele II and being renovated at the time of writing, is Foggia's only noteworthy sight. The lower half is Romanesque; the upper part was rebuilt in exuberant baroque style after the earthquake in 1731. Most of the cathedral's treasures were lost in the quake but you can see a Byzantine icon preserved in a chapel inside the church. Legend has it that in the 11th century, shepherds discovered the icon lying in a pond over which burned three flames. These flames are now the symbol of the city.

The **Museo Civico** (☎ 0881 72 62 45; Piazza Nigri; admission free; ☞ 9am-1pm Tue-Sun & 4-7pm Tue & Thu) houses archaeological finds from the area, folk crafts and some Carlo Levi paintings in an attractive old *palazzo*.

Sleeping & Eating

Albergo Venezia (☎ 0881 77 09 03; fax 0881 77 09 04; Via Piave 40; s/d €50/65; ☞) Rooms at this conveniently central hotel, close to the train station, are functional and OK value, but have all the charm of a doctor's waiting room.

Masseria Canestrello (☎ 338 952 06 41; www.masseriacanestrello.it; Candela; s €50-90, d €60-120; 🍷) A whitewashed, elegant and soberly decorated *masseria* (manor farm), once a sheep farm on the transhumance track, Canestrello is 48km from Foggia, close to the Basilicata border. The staff will pick you up from the nearest town, airport or train station.

Hotel Cicoella (☎ 0881 56 61 11; www.hotelcicoella.it; Foggia; s €120-152, d €160-225; 🍷) Foggia's finest, a rust-red landmark founded more than 100 years ago, blends old-world charm with contemporary trimmings. Rooms are all-mod-con inoffensive classics.

Ristorante Margutta (☎ 0881 70 80 60; Via Piave 33; meals €25) Hung with ivy, this friendly, frescoed restaurant near Albergo Venezia is popular and often full. It specialises in fish dishes.

L'Osteria di Zio Aldo (☎ 0881 70 81 04; Via Arpi 62; meals €50; 🍷 Mon-Sat) Only a candle flicker from the cathedral, this is overseen by ebullient Aldo Massimo, a celebrity-chef in the making. His domain is a bottle-lined Aladdin's cave, ideal for a long meal of serious regional cooking.

Getting There & Around

BUS

Buses depart from Piazzale Vittorio Veneto, by the train station, for towns throughout Foggia province. There are fewer at weekends.

SITA (☎ 0881 77 31 17; www.sitabus.it in Italian) has services to/from Vieste (€4.90, 2¼ hours, five daily), Manfredonia (€1.90, 50 minutes, roughly hourly), Monte Sant'Angelo (€2.70, 1½ hours, three daily), San Giovanni Rotondo (€2.70, one hour, half-hourly), Lucera (€1.30, 30 minutes, six daily) and Campobasso in Molise (€5.70, 1½ hours, two daily).

Ferrovie del Gargano (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com in Italian) has frequent services to/from Manfredonia (€2.30, 45 minutes). You need to change at Mattinata for Monte Sant'Angelo. There are also services to/from Vieste (2¼ hours), Barletta (1¼ hours), Troia (€1.50, 45 minutes) and Lucera (25 minutes, at least hourly).

CLP (☎ 081 251 41 57; www.dpbs.it) goes to Naples (€9, two hours, at least every two hours) – the bus is faster than the train. Buy your ticket on board.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Take the SS16 south for Bari or north for the Adriatic coast, Termoli and Pescara. The Bologna–

Bari A14 also passes Foggia. For Naples, take the SS655, which links with the A16.

TRAIN

There are frequent services to Bari (1st/2nd class €17/14, 1½ hours) and onto Brindisi (€26/22, three hours) and Lecce (€28/24, 3¼ hours). Northwards, trains head for Ancona (€33/24, 3½ hours) and Bologna (€46/32, 5½ hours), with fewer to Milan (€72/54, seven to nine hours).

LUCERA

pop 35,000 / elev 219m

Gruff, off-the-beaten-track Lucera has one of Puglia's most impressive castles and an attractive old town centre, where chic shops sit alongside the flat-capped population.

Founded by the Romans in the 4th century BC, it was abandoned by the 13th century. Following excommunication by Pope Gregory IX, Frederick II decided to bolster his support base in Puglia by importing 20,000 Sicilian Arabs, simultaneously diminishing the headache Arab bandits were causing him in Sicily.

It was an extraordinary move by the Christian monarch, even more so because Frederick allowed Lucera's new Muslim inhabitants the freedom to build mosques and practise their religion freely a mere 290km from Rome. Frederick picked his famous Saracen bodyguard from its inhabitants.

History, however, was less kind; when the town was taken by the rabidly Christian Angevins in 1269, every Muslim who failed to convert was slaughtered.

Lucera's **tourist office** (☎ 0881 52 27 62; www.luceraweb.net; 🍷 9am-2pm & 3-8pm Tue-Sun, 9am-2pm Oct-Mar) is near the cathedral.

Sights

Frederick II's enormous **castle** (admission free; 🍷 9am-2pm year-round & 3-8pm Apr-Sep), shows just what a big fish Lucera once was in the Pugliese pond. Built in 1233, it's 14km northwest of Lucera on a rocky hillock surrounded by a perfect pentagonal wall, almost 1km long, guarded by 24 towers.

On the site of Lucera's Great Mosque, Puglia's only Gothic **cathedral** (🍷 6.30am-noon & 4-7pm May-Sep, 5-8pm Oct-Apr) was built in 1300 by Charles II of Anjou. The altar was once the castle banqueting table.

Dominated by a huge rose window, the contemporaneous Gothic **Chiesa di San Francesco**

TROIA

Make a detour to visit off-the-beaten-track **Troia** (20km south of Foggia), seemingly populated by elderly gentlemen, and set on a hill surrounded by a crinoline of emerald-green fields. It has a magnificent **cathedral** (Piazza Episcopo), one of Puglia's oldest (begun in 1093), which gracefully combines Arab-inspired Byzantine artistry with the blind arcades and lozenge motifs of Pisan Romanesque. The beautiful 13th-century rose window was created in Frederick II's time and is influenced by geometric Islamic art. The simplicity of the blind arcading around the base contrasts dramatically with the gargoyles above and the incredible 12th-century bronze doors featuring spidery script and lions with door knockers in their mouths.

Inside, the church is tall and elegant, and is divided into three narrow aisles lined by columned arches topped with sculpted capitals. The pulpit carving is also superb and it's worth seeking out the rich treasury.

Regular Ferrovie del Gargano buses (below) link Troia and Foggia (€1.50, 50 minutes).

(☎ 8am-noon & 4-7pm) incorporates numerous recycled materials from Lucera's 1st-century-BC **Roman amphitheatre** (admission free; ☎ 8am-2.30pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun). The amphitheatre was built for gladiatorial combat and accommodated up to 18,000 people. It's undergoing restoration so check at the tourist office if it's open before heading to it on the eastern outskirts of town.

Sleeping & Eating

B&B Mimosa (☎ 0881 54 60 66; www.mimosalucera.it; Via de' Nicastrì 36-40; s €38-45, d €60-70, tr €85-95, q €100-115) In a backstreet behind the cathedral, Mimosa offers cute studios and two-room apartments – the newest addition is a fabulous arched space adjoining the city museum.

Le Foglie di Acanto (☎ 0881 54 66 91; www.lefoglie diacanto.it; Via Frattarolo 3; s/d €60/100) Behind the cathedral, this unsigned place has palatial high-ceilinged rooms, dramatically furnished with antiques and candelabras.

La Tavernetta (☎ 0881 52 00 55; Via Schiavone 7; pizzas around €4-7; ☎ Tue-Sun) In a large exposed-brick cellar, here you'll find splendid crispy wood-fired pizzas. La Tavernetta is behind the cathedral.

Il Saraceno (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 6am-1.30am) A top-notch stand-up café opposite the cathedral, this is good for breakfast or an *aperitivo*. It also sells good-quality wines.

Tartan (Via Marrone; ☎ Thu-Tue) With a covered terrace opposite the cathedral, here you can ponder over a pint why a Scottish pub might have landed in Lucera.

Getting There & Away

Regular SITA buses (€1.30, 30 minutes) run to Lucera from Foggia (opposite), terminat-

ing in Piazza S Francesco, while Ferrovie del Gargano buses leave from Via Ospedale and cover the same route.

TRANI

pop 53,500

Trani is a Pugliese gem. Shimmering with a mother-of-pearl light, it has a sophisticated feel, particularly in summer when people pack the diminutive array of marina-side bars. Its Norman cathedral and piazza, perched above the sea, are an unforgettable sight.

The historic centre indicates a prosperous past: during the Middle Ages the town rivalled Bari in importance, and became a major embarkation point for merchants travelling to the Near East.

Some 40km from Bari, Trani makes an ideal base for exploring this part of Puglia.

Orientation & Information

Most provincial buses depart from the **train station** (☎ 0833 58 88 01; Piazza XX Settembre). From the station, Via Cavour leads through Piazza della Repubblica, the main square, to Piazza Plebiscito and the public gardens. Turn left for the harbour and cathedral.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0883 58 88 30; 1st fl, Palazzo Palmieri, Piazza Trieste; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri, plus 3.30-5.30pm Tue & Thu) is 200m south of the cathedral and keeps longer hours in summer.

Sights

Surrounded by a rare light and space, the dramatic seafront **cathedral** (☎ 0883 58 24 70; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8.15am-12.15pm & 3.15-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.45pm & 4-7pm Sat & Sun) is dedicated to St Nicholas the Pilgrim, famous for being foolish. The Greek Christian wandered

through Puglia, crying 'Kyrie eleison' (Greek for 'Lord, have mercy'). First thought to be a simpleton, he was revered after his death (aged 19) after several miracles attributed to him occurred.

Started in 1097 on the site of a Byzantine church, the cathedral was completed in the 13th century. The stunning original bronze doors (now displayed inside) were cast by Barisano da Trani, an accomplished 12th-century artisan.

The grand interior of the cathedral is stunningly simple, in Norman style, and is lined by colonnades. Near the main altar, take a look at the remains of a 12th-century floor mosaic, stylistically similar to that in Otranto. Below the church is the crypt, a forest of ancient columns where the bones of St Nicholas are kept beneath the altar.

The crypt opens onto the Byzantine Chiesa di Santa Maria della Scala, which itself sits on the Ipogeo San Leucio, a chamber believed to date from the 6th century.

Two hundred metres north of the cathedral is Trani's other major landmark, the vast, almost modernist Swabian **castle** (☎ 0883 50 66 03; Piazza Manfredi 16; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm) built by Frederick II in 1233. Charles V later strengthened the fortifications, and it was used as a prison from 1844 to 1974.

Also in the historic centre is the 12th-century **Ognissanti Church** (Via Ognissanti; ☎ hours vary), built by the Knights Templar. Here Norman knights swore allegiance to Bohemond I of Antioch, their leader, before setting off on the First Crusade.

Scolanova Church (☎ 0883 48 17 99; Via Scolanova 23; ☎ hours vary) was once a synagogue in the ancient Jewish quarter. Inside is a beautiful Byzantine painting of Madonna dei Martiri.

Sleeping

Centro Storico (☎ 0883 50 61 76; www.bbtrani.it; Via Leopardi 29; d €50-60) With pots of character, this simple, old-fashioned B&B inhabits an old backstreet monastery and is run by an elderly couple. There's a courtyard filled with orange and lemon trees where you can have breakfast.

Albergo Lucy (☎ 0883 48 10 22; www.albergolucy.com; Piazza Plebiscito 11; d/tr/q €55/75/95) In a restored 17th-century *palazzo* overlooking a leafy square, close to the shimmering port, this place offers a cheery welcome and huge, high-ceilinged rooms full of charm and light.

Hotel Regia (☎ /fax 0883 58 44 44; Piazza del Duomo 2; s €120-130, d €130-150; ☎) A lone building facing the cathedral, the understated grandeur of 18th-century Palazzo Filisio houses a charming hotel. Rooms are sober and stylish, and there's a good restaurant (meals €30).

Eating

La Darsena (☎ 0883 48 73 33; Via Statuti Marittimi 98; meals €30; ☎ Tue-Sun) La Darsena is housed in the waterfront Palazzo Palumbo-Quercia. Outside tables are shielded by thick greenery, inside photos of old Puglia clutter the walls under a huge wrought-iron dragon chandelier. The seafood here is splendid.

Corteinfiore (☎ 0883 50 84 02; Via Ognissanti 18; meals €30; ☎ Tue-Sun) This feels outdoorsy, with a marquee-conservatory arrangement, wooden decking, sunny yellow tablecloths and beviés of friendly waiters. Wines are excellent and the cooking is delicious, with dishes such as pasta with monkfish and clams.

Torrente Antico (☎ 0883 48 79 11; Via Fusco 3; meals €35; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) A good excuse to plunge into Trani's backstreets. The cooking is pure Puglia, using high-quality produce, and the wine list is excellent.

Getting There & Away

Bari STP (☎ 0883 49 18 00; www.stpspa.it) travels along the coast and inland, serving Barletta (€1, 20 minutes, half-hourly), Andria (€1, 20 minutes, at least hourly) and Bari (€2, 45 minutes, frequent). Services depart from **Bar Desirée** (☎ 0883 49 10 30; Piazza XX Settembre 7), which also has timetables and tickets.

The SS16 runs through Trani, linking it to Bari and Foggia, or you can hook up with the A14 Bologna-Bari autostrada.

Trani is on the main train line between Bari (€2.60, 30 to 60 minutes, frequent) and Foggia (€5.10, one hour, frequent) and is easily reached from other coastal towns.

AROUND TRANI

Barletta

Barletta is an important, prosperous town – as big as Lecce – and has a 4th-century bronze Colossus and a splendid art gallery.

Crusaders embarked for the Holy Land from Barletta's port and King Richard the Lionheart helped build Barletta's cathedral, the principal seat of the Archbishop of Nazareth for some 600 years (1291–1891).

In the centre, on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, looms the 5m-high Roman **Colossus**, the largest surviving Roman bronze in the world. The Venetians stole the Colossus in 1203 after the sack of Constantinople, but there was a shipwreck and the statue washed ashore. For years it lay untouched – Barletta's inhabitants were too superstitious to go anywhere near it – but it was finally brought to the centre where its missing hands and legs were restored. It was nearly melted down in 1309 to make a bell.

The newly restored Palazzo della Marra is now the **Pinacoteca Giuseppe de Nittis** (☎ 0883 57 86 15; www.pinacotecadenittis.it; Via Cialdini 75; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun). It has a wonderful display of the work of local hero De Nittis – the only Italian impressionist.

From Via Cialdini you can wander straight down into the shady alleys of the *centro storico* (historic city centre) which houses the 12th-century **cathedral** (☎ 0883 49 42 10; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-7pm). It has a Romanesque front, a Gothic back and Arabesque designs on the portals. Ferdinand of Aragon was crowned king here in 1459.

Barletta's pale, squared-off **castle** (☎ 0883 57 83 20; Piazza Corvi; admission €4; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun) is one of Italy's largest, built in 1233 over a Norman structure and developed by Frederick II, who launched the Third Crusade from here.

If you want to eat, try **BaccOsteria** (☎ 0883 53 40 00; Via San Giorgio 5; meals €30; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) near the cathedral, a cosy barrel-vaulted place serving excellent seafood, with a glass floor exposing the well-stocked wine cellar.

Disfida di Barletta (Challenge of Barletta) is one of Italy's best-known medieval pageants. It celebrates a duel between 13 Italian and 13 French knights on 13 February 1503 that was sparked by the French mocking the Italians as poor fighters. They were proved wrong, and it's re-enacted in Barletta not only in February, but in July too.

From the bus station, on Via Manfredi, **Ferrovie del Gargano** (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com in Italian) regularly serves Foggia (€4.60, 1¼ hours); **Bari** STP (☎ 0883 49 18 00; www.stpspa.it) travels to Trani (€1, 20 minutes, half-hourly), Molfetta (€2, 50 minutes) and Bari (€3, one hour 20 minutes).

Barletta is on both the Bari–Foggia coastal train line and the Bari–Nord train line.

Castel del Monte

You'll see **Castel del Monte** (☎ 0883 56 99 97; admission €3; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Oct-Feb, 3pm-7.45pm Mar-Sep) from miles away, an unearthly geometric shape on a hilltop. Mysterious, and perfectly octagonal, it's one of southern Italy's most talked-about landmarks and a Unesco World Heritage Site.

No-one knows why Frederick II built it. Nobody has ever lived here – note the lack of kitchens – and there's no nearby town or strategic crossroads. It was not built to defend anything, as it has no moat or drawbridge, no arrow slits, and no trapdoors for pouring boiling oil on invaders.

Some theories claim that according to mid-13th century beliefs in geometric symbolism, the octagon represented the union of the circle and square, of God-perfection (the infinite) and man-perfection (the finite). The castle was therefore nothing less than a celebration of the relationship between man and God. Others claim it related to astronomy, or it was just a hunting lodge.

The castle has eight octagonal towers. Its interconnecting rooms have decorative marble columns and fireplaces, and the doorways and windows are framed in corallite stone, which once covered the entire lower floor. Ancient sculptures that once adorned the building are all gone. Many of the towers have washing rooms – Frederick II, like the Arab world he admired, set great store by cleanliness.

Without a car, getting here is a pain. There are buses from Andria to Castel del Monte at 9.15am, 12.15pm and 4pm. Buses return to Andria from the castle at 11.35am, 1.30pm and 6pm.

Andria is within easy reach of Trani by bus, or of Bari via the Bari–Nord train.

The Andria–Spinazzola bus also passes close by – ask the driver to let you off.

Molfetta

This pretty little seaside town has a cappuccino-pale walled historic centre on the waterfront, with the three-domed Romanesque **Duomo San Conado** (☎ 9am-noon & 4-8pm) echoing Trani cathedral's seafront position. Cafés surround the little port, making it a pleasant place for a stop. If you've pitched up in time for a leisurely meal, try **Bufi** (☎ 080 397 15 97; Via Vittorio Emanuele 15; meals €60; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat, closed Jan & Aug) in the historic centre, which has excellent seafood dishes.

BARI

pop 328,400

'*Se Parigi avesse il mare, sarebbe una piccola Bari*' (if Paris had the sea, it would be a little Bari). This popular saying tells you more about the local sense of humour than it does about the city, but Bari has a surprising amount of charm, particularly Bari Vecchia, its increasingly chic medieval old town. Construction of the new city's graceful grid was started in 1813. When independence was gained in 1861 it had 34,000 inhabitants, but since then it has spread apace north and south along the coast.

Bari is Puglia's capital and one of the south's most prosperous cities – check out the designer shops along Via Sparano da Bari. Here you will eat and shop well alongside a demanding local clientele.

Not only this, but here lie the ashes of Saint Nicholas, also known as Father Christmas.

Orientation

Orient yourself from Piazza Aldo Moro in front of the main train station in the city's newer 19th-century section, which is laid out to a grid plan. Any of the streets heading north from Piazza Aldo Moro will take you to Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, which separates the old (with all the major monuments) and new parts of the city, and further north to the ferry terminal.

Information

There are plenty of banks and ATMs in Bari. There's a currency-exchange booth at the ferry terminal, but town exchange rates will probably be better.

CTS (☎ 080 555 99 16; Via G Postiglione 27) Good for student travel and discount flights.

Hospital (☎ 080 557 57 24; Piazza Giulio Cesare)

Morfimare Travel Agency (☎ 080 578 98 11; Corso Antonio de Tullio 36-40) Represents Amex.

Netcafé (☎ 080 524 17 56; Via Andrea da Bari 11; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-10.30pm Mon-Sat, 5-10pm Sun)

Police station (☎ 080 529 11 11; Via Gioacchino Murat 4)

Post office (Piazza Cesare Battisti; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 080 990 93 41; www.pugliaturismo.com; 1st fl, Piazza Aldo Moro 33a; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

Dangers & Annoyances

Petty crime can be a problem, so take all the usual precautions: don't leave anything in

your car; don't display money or valuables; and watch out for bag-snatchers on scooters. Be careful in Bari Vecchia's dark streets at night.

Sights

BARI VECCHIA

Bari Vecchia – the old town – is a medieval labyrinth opening onto graceful piazzas, and crams in 40 churches and more than 120 shrines. It fills a small peninsula, sheltering the new port to the west and the old port to the southeast.

You could start your exploration with the chaotic **market** alongside Piazza del Ferrarese. Stumble out of there and walk north to the glorious medieval Piazza Mercantile, fronted by the **Sedile**, the headquarters of Bari's Council of Nobles. In the square's northeast corner is the **Colonna della Giustizia** (Column of Justice), where debtors were once tied and whipped.

Northwest past the small **Chiesa di Santa Ana** is the remarkable **Basilica di San Nicola** (☎ 080 573 71 11; Piazza San Nicola; ☎ 7am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 7am-1pm & 4-9pm Sun), one of the south's first Norman churches. It's a splendid example of Puglian-Romanesque style, and was built to house the relics of St Nicholas (better known as Father Christmas), which were stolen from Turkey in 1087 by Baresi fishermen. His remains are said to emanate a miraculous manna liquid with special powers. For this reason – and because he is also patron saint of prisoners and children – the basilica remains an important place of pilgrimage. The interior is huge and simple, with a decorative 17th-century wooden ceiling. The magnificent 13th-century ciborium over the altar is Puglia's oldest. The shrine in the crypt, lit by hanging lamps, is beautiful.

From here, a brief walk south along Via delle Crociate brings you to the exquisitely plain 11th-century Romanesque **cathedral** (Piazza Odegitria; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm & 5-8.30pm Sat & Sun). Built over the original Byzantine church, the cathedral retains its basilica plan and Eastern-style cupola. The severely plain walls are punctuated with deep arcades and the eastern window is a tangle of plant and animal motifs.

CASTELLO SVEVO

The **Castello Svevo** (Swabian Castle; ☎ 080 528 61 11; Piazza Federico II di Svevia; admission €2; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun) broods on the edge of Bari Vecchia. The Normans originally built over the ruins of

a Roman fort. Frederick II then built over the Norman castle, incorporating it into his design – the two towers of the Norman structure still stand. The bastions, with corner towers overhanging the moat, were added in the 16th century during Spanish rule, when the castle was a magnificent residence. The huge interior shows interesting art exhibitions.

Festivals & Events

Festa di San Nicola (Festival of St Nicholas), held around 7 to 9 May, is Bari's biggest annual shindig, celebrating the 11th-century arrival of St Nicholas' relics (from Turkey). On the first evening a procession leaves Castello Svevo for the Basilica di San Nicola. The next day a fleet of boats carries the statue of St Nicholas along the coast and the evening ends with a massive fireworks competition.

Sleeping

Bari is a big commercial town and accommodation here tends to be bland, aimed at business clientele and overpriced.

Pensione Giulia (☎ 080 521 66 30; www.hotelpensione.giulia.it; Via Crisanzio 12; s/d €55/70, without bathroom €45/60) Near the train station, this popular place is family run and has some huge rooms, some small rooms, some with greying frescoes, and some a bit drab: but it's comfortable, friendly and secure.

Hotel Costa (☎ 080 521 90 15; Via Crisanzio 12; s/d €62/88; ☎) In the same building as Giulia, but a touch more upmarket, this has spic-and-span rooms, appealingly old-fashioned hallways and a friendly welcome.

Hotel Adria (☎ 080 524 66 99; www.adriahotelbari.com; Via Zuppetta 10; s/d €70/110; P ☎ ☎) Fronted by wrought-iron balconies and established in 1922, this is a great choice, with comfortable, good-value rooms that are bright and modern. There's parking and it's in an excellent location.

Palace Hotel Bari (☎ 080 521 65 51; www.palacehotelbari.it; Via Lombardi 13; s/d €185/245; P ☎ ☎) Look past its concrete exterior, and this is an oasis of hushed glitzy luxury. It has an opulent and renowned rooftop restaurant, the Murat (meals €30), which serves refined dishes (ostich risotto with champagne anyone?) and has fantastic views from its terrace.

Eating

Vini e Cucina (☎ 338 212 03 91; Strada Vallisa 23; meals €10; ☎ Mon-Sat) Grab a seat at this cult eatery in

Bari Vecchia and mix with fishermen and students alike. Rustic and filling Pugliese dishes are served up by one indefatigable waiter. You'll remember your meal here.

Al Pescatore (☎ 080 523 70 39; Piazza Federico di Svevia 116-8; meals €25) You can't leave Bari without trying its fish. The boats go out in the morning and by lunchtime the best of the catch is on your plate at Al Pescatore. The grilled squid is particularly good. In-the-know tourists and off-duty fishermen are equally at home, and there's covered outdoor seating.

Terranima (☎ 080 521 97 25; Via Putignano 213; meals €25-30; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun; ☎) With a lovely bygone feel, here you dine behind lace curtains in a cool, dark, rustic interior with flagstone floors and white-draped tables. The menu changes fortnightly, with great takes on local ingredients.

Alberosole (☎ 080 523 54 46; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 13; meals €30; ☎ Tue-Sun Sep-Jul) First-rate Alberosole is housed in an elegant arched room, and has an intimate and smart feel. The friendly service is exceptionally good, as is the imaginative Puglian cuisine. Reservations are recommended.

If you're self-catering or stocking up for a ferry journey, pass by the **market** (Piazza del Ferrarese); see p690.

Drinking

Like most student towns, Bari is good for a night out. The centre of the action is graceful Piazza Mercantile. Every night, but with the biggest crowds from Thursday to Sunday, Bari's young and beautiful congregate in the square. It's best to wander and find somewhere that takes your fancy, but a good start is **Barcollo** (☎ 080 521 38 89; Piazza Mercantile 69/70; cocktails €6; ☎ 8am-3am), where you can lounge on banquettes amid pink cushions or sit outside on the twinkling square sipping a cocktail and nibbling work-of-art hors d'oeuvres. There's live jazz on Thursday.

Shopping

Bari is smashing for shopping, ideal if you want to sample on Puglian specialities. For designer shops and the big Italian chains, wander along Via Sparant da Bari.

De Carne (Via Calefati 128; ☎ 8am-2pm & 5-8.40pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 8am-2pm Thu) Breathe in delicious scents and go crazy buying fine regional produce at venerable delicatessen De Carne. There are also some tasty takeaway dishes.

Il Germoglio (Via Putignani 204; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat) A treasure trove of organic jams and cheeses.

Enoteca de Pasquale (Via Marchese di Montrone 87; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Stock up on Puglian wines.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Bari opened its Palese **airport** (BRI; ☎ 080 580 02 00; www.seap-puglia.it) in 2005, and flocks of airlines use this southern hub.

BOAT

Ferries run from Bari to Greece, Turkey, Albania, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. All boat companies have offices at the ferry terminal, accessible on bus 20 from the main train station. Fares from Bari to Greece are generally more expensive than those for Brindisi to Greece. Once you've bought your ticket and paid the embarkation tax (per person or car €4), you'll get a boarding card, which must be stamped at the ferry terminal. Tariffs can be up to one-third cheaper outside mid-July to late August. Bicycles are normally free.

The main companies and their routes:

Adriatica (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.adriatica.it) To Durrës (Durazzo) in Albania. Departs most days at 11pm year-round.

Blue Star Ferries (☎ 080 52 11 416; www.bluestarferries.com) Services depart for Patras and Igoumenitsa at 8pm.

Jadrolinija (☎ in Croatia 385-516 66 111; www.jadrolinija.hr) To Dubrovnik in Croatia.

Montenegro Lines (☎ 080 578 98 27; www.morfimare.it) Reservations via Morfimare Travel Agency (see p690); to Bari in Montenegro (10pm Sunday to Friday April to September); Cephalonia (6.30pm July to September, every few days); Igoumenitsa (6.30pm daily April to September); and Patras (6.30pm daily April to September).

Superfast (☎ 080 528 28 28; www.superfast.com) To Igoumenitsa, Patras (Patrasa) and Corfu, in Greece.

FERRY CROSSINGS FROM BARI

Destination	Cost (€) seat/cabin/car*	Duration (hr)
Bar, Montenegro	100/140/149	9
Cephalonia, Greece	134/200/122	15½
Corfu, Greece	137/202/127	11
Durrës, Albania	48/89/87	8
Igoumenitsa, Greece	134/202/122	10-12
Patras, Greece	137/202/127	16½

* cost of a return ticket in high season

Daily departure at 8pm. Accepts Eurail, Eurodomino and Inter-Rail passes (port taxes and a high-season supplement payable).

Ventouris Ferries (☎ for Greece 080 521 76 99, for Albania 521 27 56; www.ventouris.gr) Regular ferries to Igoumenitsa and Corfu (Greece), and daily ferries to Durrës (Albania).

BUS

Intercity buses leave from several locations. From Via Giuseppe Capruzzi, south of the main train station, **SITA** (☎ 080 579 01 11; www.sitabus.it in Italian) covers local destinations. **Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane** (☎ 080 572 52 29; www.fal-srl.it in Italian) buses serving Matera also depart from here (although the train is more practical), plus **Marozzi** (☎ 080 556 24 46; www.marozzivi.it) buses for Rome (€30, eight hours, day departures only – the overnight bus departs from Piazza Aldo Moro) and other long-distance destinations.

Piazza Eroi del Mare is the terminal for **Bari STP** (☎ 080 505 82 80; www.stpspa.it) buses serving Andria (€3, 1½ hours, five daily) and Taranto (€6, two hours, three daily). They also serve Barletta (€3, 1¼ hours), Molfetta (50 minutes) and Trani (€2, one hour). Frequent **Ferrottramviaria** (☎ 080 578 95 42; www.ferroviainordbarese.it) buses go to Andria (€3.40, one hour) and Ruvo di Puglia (€2.60, 40 minutes).

Buses operated by **Ferrovie del Sud-Est** (FSE; ☎ 080 546 21 11; www.fseonline.it in Italian) leave from Largo Ciaia, south of Piazza Aldo Moro, for Brindisi (€6.20, 23 to 24 hours, four daily Monday to Saturday), Taranto (€4.70, 1¼ to 2¼ hours, frequent), Alberobello (€3.20, 1¼ hours) and on to Locorotondo and Martina Franca, Grotte di Castellana (€2.10, one hour) and Ostuni (€4.30, two hours).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Bari is on the A14 autostrada, which heads northwest to Foggia, south to Taranto and connects with the A16 to Naples at Canosa di Puglia. Exit at Bari-Nord to reach the town centre.

TRAIN

A web of train lines spreads out from Bari. Note that there are fewer services on the weekend.

From the **main train station** (☎ 080 524 43 86) Eurostar trains go to Milan (1st/2nd class €82/61, eight to 9½ hours) and Rome (€35, five hours). Frequent trains serve elsewhere in Puglia,

including Foggia (€10.40, 1½ hours), Brindisi (€6.80, 1¼ hours), Lecce (€11.60, 1½ to two hours) and Taranto (€6.80, 1¼ hours).

Ferrovie Bari-Nord (☎ 080 578 95 42; www.ferrovianordbarese.it) goes to the airport (€0.90, 10 minutes, around 20 daily), continuing to Bitonto, Andria and Barletta.

Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane (☎ 080 572 52 29; www.fal-srl.it) goes to Altamura (€2.60, one hour, at least hourly), Matera (€4, 1½ hours, 13 daily) and Potenza (€8.60, four hours, four daily).

FSE trains (☎ 080 546 21 11; www.fseonline.it in Italian) head for Alberobello (€3.40, 1½ hours, hourly), Martina Franca (€4, 1¼ hours, hourly) and Taranto (€6.30, 2½ to three hours, six daily), leaving from the station in Via Oberdan – cross under the train tracks south of Piazza Luigi di Savoia and head east along Via Giuseppe Capruzzi for about 500m.

Getting Around

To reach the airport take Azienda Municipale Trasporti Autofiloviari Baresi (AmTAB) bus 16 (€0.77, 40 minutes, hourly 5am to 11pm) from Piazza Aldo Moro. Tempesta buses run a faster service (€4.15, 30 minutes), leaving from the main train station.

Central Bari is compact – a 15-minute walk will take you from Piazza Aldo Moro to the old town. For the ferry terminal (€1) take bus 20 from Piazza Aldo Moro.

Street parking is hell. There's a large free parking area south of the main port entrance, otherwise there's a large multistorey car park between the main and Ferrovie del Sud-Est train stations and one on Via Zuppetta opposite Hotel Adria.

MURGIA PLATEAU & TRULLI COUNTRY

Between the Ionian and Adriatic coasts, rises the great limestone plateau of the Murgia (473m). It has a strange karst geology, the landscape riddled with holes and ravines through which small streams and rivers gurgle creating what is in effect a giant sponge. At the heart of the Murge lies the idyllic Valle d'Itria. Here you will begin to spot curious circular stone-built houses dotting the countryside, their roofs tapering up to a stubby and endearing point. These are *trulli*, Puglia's unique rural architecture. It's unclear why the architecture developed in this way; one popular story says that it was so the dry-stone constructions could be quickly dismantled, to avoid payment of building taxes.

The rolling green valley is crisscrossed by dry-stone walls, vineyards, almond and olive groves and winding country lanes, and punctuated by the towns of Alberobello, Locorotondo, Cisternino, Martina Franca and Ostuni, each shimmering with charm. This is the part of Puglia most visited by foreign tourists and is the best served for hotels and luxury *masserias*. Around here also are many of Puglia's self-catering villas; to find them, try websites such as www.tuscanynow.com, www.ownersdirect.co.uk, www.holidayhomesinitaly.co.uk, www.longtravel.co.uk, and www.trulliland.co.uk.

Grotte di Castellana

Don't miss these spectacular limestone *caves* (☎ 800 23 19 76, 080 499 82 11; www.grottedicastellana.it; Piazzale Anelli; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-12.30pm Nov-Mar), 40km southeast of Bari, and Italy's longest natural subterranean network. The interlinked galleries, first discovered in 1938, contain an incredible range of underground landscapes, with extraordinary stalactite and stalagmite formations – look out for the jellyfish, the bacon and the stocking. The highlight is the Grotta Bianca (White Grotto), an eerie white alabaster cavern hung with stiletto-thin stalactites.

There are two tours in English: a 1km, 50-minute tour that doesn't include the Grotta Bianca (on the half-hour, €8); and a 3km, two-hour tour (on the hour, €13) that does include it. The temperature inside the cave averages 15°C so take a light jacket. Visit, too, the **Museo Speleologico Franco Anelli** (☎ 080 499 82 30; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-1pm Nov–mid-Mar) or the **osservatorio astronomico** (☎ 080 499 82 11), which offers wonderful views.

The grotto can be reached by rail from Bari on the FSE Bari–Taranto train line. Get off at Castellana Grotte (€2.60, one hour, hourly). From the station there are local buses to the caves, 2km away.

Alberobello

pop 10,900

Unesco World Heritage Site Alberobello is a town of stubby pointed roofs, white-tipped as if dusted by snow. It wouldn't be a surprise to see a gnome pop out to water its window-boxes. The Zona dei Trulli on the western hill of Alberobello is a dense mass of 1500 beehive-shaped houses, dry-stone buildings made

from local limestone, none older than the 14th century. Inhabitants disappointingly do not wear pointy hats, but they do sell anything a visitor might want, from miniature *trulli* to rustic woollen shawls.

The town is named after the primitive oak forest *Arboris Belli* (beautiful trees) that once covered this area. It's an amazing area, but is also something of a tourist trap – from May to October busloads of tourists pile into *trullo* homes, drink in *trullo* bars and shop in *trullo* shops.

ORIENTATION

Alberobello spreads across two hills. The new town is perched on the eastern hilltop, while the Zona dei Trulli lies on the western hill, and consists of two adjacent neighbourhoods, the Rione Monti and the Rione Aia Piccola.

If you park in Lago Martellotta, follow the steps up the Piazza del Popolo where Belvedere Trulli offers fabulous views over the whole higgledy-piggledy picture.

INFORMATION

Tourist information office (☎ 080 432 28 22; Monte Nero 1; ☎ 9am-8pm) Local office in the Zona dei Trulli.

Tourist office (☎ 080 432 51 71; Piazza del Popolo; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Tue & Thu) In the Casa d'Amore, off the main square.

SIGHTS

Sightseeing in Alberobello mainly consists of wandering around admiring its eccentricity. Within the old town quarter of **Rione Monti** over 1000 *trulli* cascade down the hillside, most of which are now souvenir shops. To its east, on the other side of Via Indipendenza, is **Rione Aia Piccola**. This neighbourhood is much less commercialised, with 400 *trulli*, many still used as family dwellings. You can climb up for a rooftop view at many shops, although it might make you feel obliged to buy something.

For the all-round *trullo* experience, you can stay in one. As well as *trullo* hotels, there are lots that have been converted into rentable holiday homes (see right).

In the modern part of town, the 18th-century **Trullo Sovrano** (☎ 080 432 60 30; www.trullosovrano.it; Piazza Sacramento; admission €1.50; ☎ 10am-7pm) is the only two-floor *trullo*, built by a wealthy priest's family. It's a small museum giving something of the atmosphere of *trullo* life, with sweet, rounded rooms.

SLEEPING & EATING

It's a unique experience to stay in your own *trullo*, though some people might find Alberobello too touristy to use as a base.

Camping dei Trulli (☎ 080 432 36 99; www.campingdeitrulli.com; Via Castellana Grotte, Km1.5; per person €5-7, tent €4-6, car €2-3, bungalows per person €20-30, trulli per person €30-40; (P) (♿)) This well-equipped camp site is 1.5km out of town on Via Castellana Grotte. It has a restaurant, market, two swimming pools, tennis courts and bicycle hire, and you can also rent *trulli* or mini-apartments.

Trullidea (☎ 080 432 38 60; www.trullidea.it; Via Monte Nero 15; 2-5 person trulli €86-170) A series of 25 renovated *trulli* in Alberobello's Trulli Zone, these are snug but can feel a bit dark as you're hemmed in by the other *trulli*. They're available on a self-catering, B&B, or half- or full-board basis.

La Cantina (☎ 080 432 34 73; Vico Lippolis 9; meals €20; ☎ Wed-Mon Jul-Sep) In a town full of tourist traps this is a refreshingly good local restaurant serving extremely fresh food, and has been on the go since 1958. It's cosy, with checked tablecloths, and you can watch the chef at work in the open kitchen. The seasonal vegetables are a real highlight.

Il Poeta Contadino (☎ 080 432 19 17; Via Indipendenza 21; meals €80; ☎ Tue-Sun Feb-Dec) Renowned as one of Italy's best restaurants, this is in a fabulous arched former stable hung with chandeliers, and offers taste sensations such as artichoke puff with *burrata* (Italian cheese) and anchovy salsa.

For excellent wines try central **Enoteca L'Anima del Vino** (☎ 080 432 13 88; Largo Martellotta 93; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-9pm Tue-Sat 9.30am-1pm Sun). There's also a good fruit and vegetable market on this main drag.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Alberobello is easily accessible from Bari (€3.10, 1½ hours, hourly) on the FSE Bari-Taranto train line. From the station, walk straight ahead along Via Mazzini, which becomes Via Garibaldi, to reach Piazza del Popolo.

Locorotondo

pop 14,000

Locorotondo (circular place) is a shimmering-white constellation on a hilltop on the Murge plateau. It's a *borghi più belli d'Italia* (www.borghitalia.it), that is, it's rated as one of the

most beautiful towns in Italy. The streets are paved with smooth ivory-coloured stones, with the church of **Santa Maria della Graecia** their sunbaked centrepiece.

From **Villa Comunale**, a communal garden, you can enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding valley.

There's a central **tourist office** (☎ 080 431 30 99; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 27).

Not only is this deepest *trulli* country, but it's also the drink-me, liquid heart of the Puglian wine region. You simply cannot come to Locorotondo without sampling some of the local Spumante. You can do this at the local winery, **Cantina del Locorotondo** (☎ 080 431 16 44; www.locorotondoc.com; Via Madonna della Catena 99).

Truddhi (☎ 080 443 13 26; www.trulliresidence.it; C da Tritto 292; 1 room €415-685, 2 room €578-995, 3 room €715-1215) is a small cluster of self-catering *trulli* in the hamlet of Tritto near Locorotondo. It's run by Mino and Carole and, being a lecturer in gastronomy Mino is happy to give cooking demonstrations.

Charming trattoria **U'Curduun** (☎ 080 431 70 70; Via Dura 19; meals €25; ☎ 9am-1am Sep-May, to 2am Wed-Mon Jun-Aug) is well signposted in the midst of the historic centre. It's an arched, cosy restaurant – a cool, dark lunch spot to steal into on a blazingly bright day. All produce here is organic. Good service and a buzzing atmosphere.

Just off the main square is the well-regarded **La Taverna del Duca** (☎ 080 431 30 07; Via Papadotero 3; meals €35), a serene place serving local classics such as *orecchiette* ('little ears' pasta). The antipasti is particularly good.

Locorotondo is easily accessible by frequent trains from Bari (€4, 1½ to two hours) on the FSE Bari–Taranto train line.

Cisternino

pop 12,000

A lovely hilltop town, slow-paced, white-washed Cisternino is surrounded by hundreds of silver-green olive trees. Beside its 13th-century **Chiesa Matrice** and **Torre Civica** there's a pretty communal garden with rural views. If you take Via Basilioni next to the tower you can amble along an elegant route right to the central piazza, Vittorio Emanuele.

Cisternino has a grand tradition of *fornello pronto* (ready-to-go roast or grilled meat) and in numerous butcher's shops and trattorias you can select a cut of meat, which is then promptly cooked on the spot. Try it under rustic whitewashed arches at **Trattoria La Botte** (☎ 080 444 78 50; Via Santa Lucia 47; meals €20; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-1am Mon-Wed & Sat Jun-Sep, to 11pm Oct-May), which also serves up Pugliese favourites such as *fave e verdura* (beans and greens).

For some Cisternino chic, try the *aperitivi* at **Bar Fod** (☎ 080 444 85 46; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 5; ☎ 8am-1.30pm & 3pm-3am Fri-Wed) in the historic centre's main square.

Cisternino is accessible by regular trains from Bari (€4, 45 minutes, three daily) on the FSE Bari–Taranto train line.

Martina Franca

pop 49,100

Graceful baroque buildings, airy piazzas and a web of lanes make up Martina Franca's old quarter, Puglia at its most elegant. This town is the highest in the Murgia, and was founded in the 10th century by refugees fleeing the Arab invasion of Taranto. It only started to flourish in the 14th century when Philip of Anjou granted tax exemptions (*franchigie*, hence Franca); the town became so wealthy that a castle and defensive walls complete with

LUSH LOCATIONS

Puglia's most luxurious *masserias* cluster around Fasano, with discreet drives leading to worlds where the linen is soft, the pools glorious, the look rustic-regal and the golf courses pea-green. **Masseria Torre Coccoaro** (☎ 080 482 93 10; www.masseriatorrecoocoaro.com; Contrada Coccoaro 8, Savelletti di Fasano; d €333-466; ☎ ☎ ☎), around 10km from Locorotondo, has a hacienda feel. This super-chic yet countrified *masseria* is set in an evocative fortified farmhouse, with a glorious spa set in a cave, a beach-style swimming pool and restaurant (meals €90). Next door is **Masseria Maizza** (www.masseriatorremaizza.com; ☎ ☎ ☎). Run by the same people, it is a similarly luxurious farm-complex conversion but is more contemporary and glamorous, and aimed at couples. The two *masserias* share a balmy beach club (about 4km away) and neighbouring golf course, and also run cookery courses. Closer to the coast is the converted 16th-century **Masseria San Domenico** (☎ 080 482 77 69; www.imasseria.com; d €350-540, ste €470-2300; ☎ ☎ ☎) with sumptuous rooms and a super spa.

24 solid bastions were built. The modern-day town is just as comfortable and contented as its historic counterpart and is a prosperous wine-producing centre.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

The FSE train station is downhill from the historic centre. Go right along Viale della Stazione, continuing along Via Alessandro Fighera to Corso Italia; continue to the left along Corso Italia to Piazza XX Settembre.

The **tourist office** (☎ 080 480 57 02; Piazza Roma 37; ☹ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri, 5.30-7.30pm Tue & Thu, 9am-12.30pm Sat) is within Palazzo Ducale.

SIGHTS

Passing under the baroque **Arco di Sant'Antonio** at the western end of pedestrianised Piazza XX Settembre, you emerge into Piazza Roma, dominated by the imposing, elegant 17th-century **Palazzo Ducale**, built over an ancient castle and now used as municipal offices.

From Piazza Roma, follow the fine Corso Vittorio Emanuele, with baroque townhouses, to reach Piazza Plebiscito, the centre's baroque heart. The piazza's overlooked by the 18th-century **Basilica di San Martino** (Piazza Plebiscito), its centrepiece city patron, St Martin, swinging a sword and sharing his cloak with a beggar.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festival della Valle d'Itria is an annual music feast (late July to early August) featuring international performances of opera, classical and jazz. For information, contact the **Centro Artistico Musicale Paolo Grassi** (☎ 080 480 51 00; www.festivaldellavalleeditria.it; ☹ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri) in the Palazzo Ducale.

SLEEPING & EATING

B&B San Martino (☎ 080 48 56 01; http://xoomer.alice.it/bed-and-breakfast-sanmartino/; Via Abate Fighera 32; apt €40-120, per week €250-620; ☹ ☹) A nice B&B in a great location just off Piazza XX Settembre. The proto-rustic apartments have exposed stone walls, wrought-iron beds and small kitchenettes, and unbelievably there is a pool. Very good value.

Villaggio In (☎ 080 480 50 21; www.villaggioin.it; Via Arco Grassi 8; apt per wk for 2/3/4/5/6 people €335-420/380-550/450-895/615-710/680-820) This has a selection of attractive, white-painted, arched apartments, from bedsits to three-room flats. There's also a classy restaurant (open to non-guests, meals €20), with a summer rooftop terrace.

Ciacco (☎ 080 480 04 72; Via C Ugolino; meals €20; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Dive into the historic centre to find Ciacco, a traditional restaurant with white-clad tables and a cosy fireplace, serving up Puglian cuisine in a modern key. It's opposite the communal gardens.

La Cantina del Toscana (☎ 080 430 28 27; Piazza Maria Immacolata; meals €20; ☹ Thu-Tue) Despite the name (The Tuscan Cellar) this welcoming gingham-and straw-decked place has mainly Pugliese dishes – the *fagioli e pasta* (pasta and beans) is particularly good.

Il Ritrovo degli Amici (☎ 080 483 92 49; Corso Messapia 8; meals €35; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat & lunch Sun Mar-Jan) This excellent restaurant, with stone walls and vaulting, has a convivial atmosphere oiled by the region's Spumante. Dishes are traditional, and salamis and sausages the specialities.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Take the **FSE** (☎ 080 546 21 11) train from Bari (€4, 1½ hours, hourly) or Taranto (€2.10, 40 minutes, seven daily).

FSE buses serve Alberobello (€1.20, 30 minutes, five Monday to Saturday) and Lecce (€5.70, two hours, seven daily).

Buses III and IV connect the FSE train station, down on the plain, with Piazza XX Settembre.

Ostuni

pop 32,800

Ostuni shines like a beacon, a pearly white, rampart-ringed town across three hills and surrounded by olive groves. It's the end of the Trulli region and the beginning of the hot, dry Penisola Salentina. Chic, with some excellent restaurants, stylish bars and swish yet intimate places to stay, it's packed in summer.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

From Piazza della Libertà, where the new town meets the old, take Via Cattedrale to the cathedral. From the cathedral piazza, turn right for a view across the olive groves to the Adriatic Sea, or turn left to get agreeably lost in whitewashed lanes.

Ostuni's **tourist office** (☎ 0831 30 12 68; Corso Mazzini 8; ☹ 8am-2pm & 5.30-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 5.30-8.30pm Sat & Sun) is off Piazza della Libertà.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Museo di Cività Preclassiche della Murgia** (☎ 0831 33 63 83; Via Cattedrale 15; admission free; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Thu, 3.30-7pm Sun Apr-Oct,

3.30-7pm Tue & Thu Nov-Mar), in the Convento delle Monacelle, was closed for renovation at the time of writing. When open, you can see the 25,000-year-old star of the show, Delia. She was pregnant at the time of her death and her well-preserved skeleton was found in a local cave. Many of the finds here come from the Palaeolithic burial ground, now the **Parco Archeologico e Naturale di Arignano**, which can be visited by appointment (ask at the museum). Close to the museum is Ostuni's dramatic 15th-century **cathedral**.

Ostuni is surrounded by olive groves so this is the place to buy some of the region's DOC 'Collina di Brindisi' – either delicate, medium or strong – direct from producers such as **Cooperativa Agricola Sololio** (☎ 0831 33 29 52; www.ulivetibruno.it in Italian; Corso Mazzini 7).

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Ostuni's annual feast day, **La Cavalcata**, is held on 26 August, when processions of horsemen dressed in glittering red-and-white uniforms (resembling Indian grooms on their way to be wed) follow the statue of Sant'Oronzo around town.

SLEEPING

Nonna Isa (☎ 0831 33 25 15; www.nonnaisa.it; Via Vittorio Alfieri 9; s €24-37, d €57-74) A B&B with three spic-and-span rooms hung with bright African prints. Nonna is in the newer part of town, a short walk down from the historic centre.

Le Sole Blu (☎ 0831 30 38 56; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 16; s €30-40, d €60-80) In the new town, but in an old building, this is close to the historic centre and is a simple, old-fashioned B&B, run by friendly folk.

ourpick! **Il Frantoio** (☎ 0832 33 02 76; www.trecolline.it; SS16, Km874; per person €88-108; (P)) For a country-house stay, head to this charming, white-washed farmhouse, where the owners still live and work, producing high-quality organic olive oil. (Or else book yourself in for one of the marathon 10-course Sunday lunches (€53 including copious amounts of wine), or a balmy, candlelit dinner. The food is unbelievably good here.) Il Frantoio lies 5km outside Ostuni along the SS16 in the direction of Fasano. You'll see the sign on your left-hand side when you reach the Km874 sign.

Borgo San Marco (☎ 080 439 57 57; www.borgosanmarco.it; s €105-135, d €170-190) A working farm producing luscious olive oil, this restored 15th-century structure is a 14-room hotel, and is

traditional with a bohemian edge. Nearby are some frescoed rock churches to explore. It's 8km from Ostuni. To get here take the SS379 in the direction of Bari, exiting at the sign that says SC San Marco – Zona industriale Sud Fasano, then follow the signs.

La Sommità Relais Culti (☎ 0831 30 59 25; www.lasommita.it; Via Scipione Petrarolo 7; s/d €180/330; (P) ♿ ♻️) Furnished in Milanese lifestyle brand Culti, this is Ostuni's most luxurious hideaway. This place has minimalist opulence, with the modernist, monochrome design serenely complementing the pale cream arches of the ancient building. There's also a stunning restaurant.

EATING

Osteria Piazzetta Cattedrale (☎ 0831 33 50 26; Via Arcidiacono Trinchera 7; meals €25) Tucked under an arch opposite Ostuni's cathedral is this tiny little hostelry serving up magical food. The antipasti is exquisite and includes a melt-in-your-mouth courgette soufflé and divine *burrata* cheese (apparently a favourite of the Shah of Iran). The service is attentive, and the atmosphere deeply contented.

Osteria del Tempo Perso (☎ 0831 30 33 20; Gaetano Tanzarella Vitale 47; meals €30; ♻️ dinner daily, lunch Sun) A sophisticated rustic restaurant in a former bakery, this is elegant and cavernous, and serves great Pugliese food, specialising in roasted meats. To get here, face the cathedral's south wall, and turn right through an archway into Largo Giuseppe Spennati then follow the signs to the restaurant.

Porta Nova (☎ 0831 33 89 83; Via G Petrarolo 38; meals €45; ♻️ Thu-Tue) On the old city wall, here you can revel in the rolling views from the terrace or nestle in the cosy, elegant interior, while feasting on top-notch local cuisine (specialising in fish and seafood; try the risotto) and wines.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

STP buses run to Brindisi (€2.60, 50 minutes, six daily), leaving from Piazza Italia in the newer part of Ostuni, and to Martina Franca (€1.70, 45 minutes, five daily).

Trains run frequently to Brindisi (€2.30, 30 minutes) and Bari (€4.60, one hour 10 minutes). A half-hourly local bus covers the 2.5km between the station and town.

Oria

pop 15,400

The multicoloured dome of Oria's **cathedral** can be seen for miles around, surrounded by

the narrow streets of this appealing medieval town. A curious memento mori – 11 mummies of former monks – is guarded in the cathedral crypt. Surmounting the town, the Frederick II **castle** (☎ 0831 84 00 09; 🕒 9.30am–12.30pm Mar–Oct, 3.30–6.30pm Mar–mid–Jun & mid–Sep–Oct, 5–8pm mid–Jun–mid–Sep, by appointment in winter), built in a triangle shape, has been carefully restored and has a pretty garden.

Stay at **Borgo di Oria** (☎ 329 230 75 06; www.borgodioria.it; apt €70–100, per week €250–550; 🏠), run by the helpful Francesco Pipino, recommended by readers and offering seven characterful self-catering apartments in the historic centre.

Dating back to Frederick II's reign, **Il Torneo dei Rioni**, in mid-August, is the annual battle between the town's quarters. It takes the form of a spectacular medieval *palio* (horse race).

Oria is on the Brindisi–Taranto line and there are lots of trains stopping at Lecce and Ostuni. You can change at Francavilla Fontana for Alberobello, Martina France etc.

BRINDISI

pop 87,900

Like all ports, Brindisi has its seamy side, but it's also surprisingly balmy, particularly the palm-lined avenue linking the port to the train station and the promenade stretching along the interesting seafront.

The town was the end of the ancient Roman road, Via Appia, down whose weary length trudged legionnaires and pilgrims, crusaders and traders all heading to Greece and the Near East. These days little has changed except Brindisi's pilgrims are sun-seekers rather than soul-seekers.

Orientation

The new port is east of town, across the Seno di Levante at Costa Morena, in a bleak industrial wilderness.

The old port is about 1km from the train station along Corso Umberto I, which leads into Corso Garibaldi. There are numerous cafés, eateries, ferry companies and travel agencies along the route.

Information

Corso Umberto I and Corso Garibaldi bristle with currency-exchange offices and banks, and several cafés have the internet.

Ferries (www.ferries.gr) Details of ferry fares and timetables to Greek destinations.

Hospital (☎ 0831 53 71 11; S57 for Mesagne) South-west of the centre.

Police station (☎ 0831 54 31 11; Via Bastioni S Giacomo)

Post office (☎ 0831 56 09 61; Piazza Vittoria)

Tourist office (☎ 0831 52 30 72; Viale Regina Margherita 44; 🕒 9am–1.30pm & 3.30–7.30pm Mon–Fri year-round, 9.30am–1.30pm Sat Sep–Jun, 3.30–9pm Sat & 5–9pm Sun July & Aug)

Sights

For centuries, two great **columns** marked the imperial Via Appia terminus, at Brindisi. One was presented to the town of Lecce (p702) back in 1666 as thanks to Sant'Oronzo for having relieved Brindisi of the plague. The other is *in situ*, a delicate, gleaming white column above a sweeping set of sun-whitened stairs. Legend has it that the Roman poet Virgil died in a house nearby after returning from Greece. A little further along the promenade is a **fountain**, unmistakably the work of Il Duco (Mussolini).

In the small historic quarter, the sand-coloured **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; closed for restoration) was built in the 11th century but then substantially remodelled about 700 years later. You can see how it may have looked from the nearby **Porta dei Cavalieri Templari**, a fanciful portico with pointy arches – all that remains of the Knights Templar's main church. Their other church, the **Tempio di San Giovanni al Sepolcro** (Via San Giovanni; 🕒 9am–1pm & 5–9pm), is a square brown bulk of Norman stone conforming to the circular plan that the Templars loved.

Abutting the cathedral's north side is the small **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0831 56 55 08; Piazza del Duomo 8; admission free; 🕒 9.30am–1.30pm Tue–Sun, 3.30–6.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 9am–1pm Sun) containing Brindisi's Punta del Serrone bronzes – a find of nearly 3000 bronze sculptures and fragments in Hellenistic Greek style. Brindisi's main sight is the **Chiesa di Santa Maria del Casale**, 4km north, towards the airport. Built by Prince Philip of Taranto around 1300, the church mixes up Puglian Romanesque, Gothic and Byzantine styles, with a Byzantine banquet of interior frescoes. The immense *Last Judgement* on the entrance wall, full of blood and thunder, is the work of Rinaldo di Taranto. To get here, follow Via Provinciale San Vito around the Seno di Ponente bay or take the airport bus. Ring the bell to gain entry to the church.

Trattoria Pantagruelo (☎ 0831 56 06 05; Via Salita di Ripalta 1; meals €40; 🍴 lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Named after French writer François Rabelais' satirical character, this charming trattoria is renowned, has a handy location for the port and serves up excellent fish and grilled meats, as well as yummy homemade desserts. In the summer, its tables fill the piazza for alfresco dining.

Marcoaurelio (☎ 0831 52 17 73; Via Ferrante Fomari 26; meals €55; 🍴 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) In a beautiful, historic building, this is the place for simple, exquisitely cooked seafood. Finish with the local speciality spumone (a hazelnut icecream confection). There's a garden terrace.

Getting There & Away

AIR

From **Papola Casale** (BDS; www.seap-puglia.it), Brindisi's small airport, there are internal flights to Rome, Naples, Milan, Bologna and Pisa. The airport is served by Alitalia, Air-One, Volareweb.com and Myair, and there are direct flights from London (Stansted) with Ryanair, from Brussels with Jetairfly, from Vienna with Austrian Airlines, and from Zurich with Helvetic. Flights are scarce in winter.

Major and local car-rental firms are represented at the airport and there are regular SITA buses to Lecce (€5, 50 minutes, eight daily) and STP buses to central Brindisi (€3, 40 minutes, nine daily).

BUS

Ferries, all of which take vehicles, leave Brindisi for Greek destinations including Corfu, Igoumenitsa, Patras and the Ionian Islands. From Patras there's a bus to Athens. Boats also serve Albania (daily) and Turkey (seasonally).

FERRY CROSSINGS FROM BRINDISI

Destination	Cost (€)* seat/ bed**/car	Duration (hr)
Cesme, Turkey	80/115/150	19
Corfu	127/177/100	12
Cephalonia, Greece	141/221/107	12
Igoumenitsa, Greece	109/188/115	9-12
Patras, Greece	126/186/106	15-20
Vlore, Albania	88/118/90	8½

*cost of a return ticket in high season **in 4-person cabin

For the new ferry terminal, follow signs for Costa Morena from the autostrada. Allow plenty of time to board your ferry.

Most ferry companies operate from June to August. All have offices at Costa Morena (the new port), and the major ones also have offices in town. There's a tax of €4 per person and car. Check in at least two hours before departure or you risk losing your reservation.

Agoudimos Lines (☎ 0831 52 14 08; www.agoudimos.it; Via Giannelli, 23) Regular ferries to Igoumenitsa via Corfu.

Endeavor Lines/Hellenic Mediterranean Lines (☎ 0831 52 85 31; www.ferries.gr; Corso Garibaldi 8)

Year-round to Corfu, Igoumenitsa and Patras, and to Cephalonia, from where you can get a ferry to Zante (Schinari), from June to early September.

Marmara Lines (☎ 0831 56 86 33; www.marmaralines.com; Corso Garibaldi 19) Weekly ferry to Cesme (Turkey). Departs Wednesday at 11.30am.

Skenderbeg Lines (☎ 0831 52 54 48; www.skenderbeglines.com; Corso Garibaldi 88) Ferries most days to Vlore (Valona; in Albania).

SNAV (☎ 0831 52 54 92; www.snav.it) Ferries to Corfu and on to Paxos.

BUS

Buses operated by **STP** (☎ 0831 54 92 45) go to Ostuni (€2.60, 50 minutes, six daily) and Lecce (€2.90, 45 minutes, two daily), as well as towns throughout the Penisola Salentina. Most leave from Via Bastioni Carlo V, in front of the train station. **FSE** (☎ 800 07 90 90) buses serving local towns also leave from here.

Marozzi runs to Rome's Stazione Tiburtina (€35.50, 8½ hours, two daily) and Pisa and Florence (€61.50, 14 hours, one daily), from Viale Arno. **Appia Travel** (☎ 0831 52 16 84; Viale Regina Margherita 8-9) sells tickets.

TRAIN

Brindisi is on the main Trenitalia (p878) train line and trains run regularly to Bari (€11, one to 1¼ hours), Lecce (Eurostar 1st/2nd class €8/6.50, 30 minutes) and Taranto (€4, one hour 10 minutes). Other destinations include Milan (Eurostar €86/65, 9½ hours) and Rome (Eurostar €67/47, six hours).

Getting Around

A free minibus connects the train station and old ferry terminal with Costa Morena. It departs two hours before boat departures. You'll need a valid ferry ticket.

To reach the airport take the bus from the old ferry terminal (€5, 15 minutes).

LECCE

pop 91,600

Central Lecce can make you giddy – the town is built of stone that glints gold and cream in the sunlight, a local material that starts off malleable yet soon hardens, making it perfect for building and sculpting. The churches are laden with barmy baroque architecture: asparagus column tops, decorative dodos and cavorting gremlins. Swooning 18th-century traveller Thomas Ashe thought it ‘the most beautiful city in Italy’, but the less-impressed Marchese Grimaldi said the façade of Santa Croce made him think a lunatic was having a nightmare.

Either way, it’s a lively, graceful university town, packed with upmarket boutiques, antique shops and furniture restorers. Convenient for both the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, it’s a great base for exploring the Penisola Salentina.

Orientation

The train station is 1km southwest of Lecce’s historic centre. The centre’s twin main squares are Piazza Sant’Oronzo and Piazza del Duomo, linked by pedestrianised Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

Information

You’ll find banks on and around Piazza Sant’Oronzo.

Clio.com (Via Fazzi 11; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Central internet café.

CTS (☎ 0832 30 18 62; Via G Palmieri 89) Travel agency for youth bargain fares.

Hospital (☎ 0832 66 11 11; Via San Cesario) About 2km south on the Gallipoli road.

Internet Train (Via Principe di Savoia 21; per hr €3.50; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 3.30-9.30pm Sun) Handy, efficient café with wi-fi. English spoken.

Liberrima (☎ 0832 24 26 26; Corte dei Cicala 1; ☎ 4.30pm-midnight Mon & Sun, 10am-midnight Tue-Sat) A hoard of books on the local area.

Libreria Mondadori (Piazza Sant’Oronzo 45/46; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4.30-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 5-10.30pm Sat & Sun) Well-stocked bookshop with maps and guides.

Police station (☎ 0832 69 11 11; Viale Otranto 1)
Post office (Piazza Libertini)

Salento Tourism (☎ 800 893 882; www.turismo.provincia.le.it; Palazzo dei Celestini, Via Umberto I 13; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri) Cultural association promoting accommodation, eateries and events in Salento.

Tourist office Corso Vittorio Emanuele 24 (☎ 0832 24 80

92; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-9pm); castle (☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun)

Sights

Lecce has more than 40 churches and at least as many *palazzi*, all built or renovated between the 17th and 18th centuries, giving the city an extraordinary cohesion. Two of the main proponents of *barocco leccese* (Lecce baroque – the craziest, most lavish decoration imaginable) were Antonio and Giuseppe Zimbalo, who both had a hand in the fantastical Basilica di Santa Croce.

BASILICA DI SANTA CROCE

It seems that hallucinating stonemasons have been at work on the **Basilica di Santa Croce** (☎ 0832 24 19 57; Via Umberto I; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 5-9pm). Sheep, dodos, cherubs and beasts writhe across the façade, a swirling magnificent allegorical feast. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries a team of artists – under Giuseppe Zimbalo – laboured to work the building up to this pitch. It’s most spectacular at night, when the sculptures are lit to create a swirling, unfurling *chiaroscuro* effect.

The interior is more conventionally Renaissance and deserves a look once you’ve finished swooning outside. Zimbalo also left his mark in the former Convento dei Celestini, just north of the basilica, which is now the **Palazzo del Governo**, the local government headquarters.

PIAZZA DEL DUOMO

Piazza del Duomo is a baroque feast, the city’s focal point and a sudden open space amid the surrounding enclosed lanes. During times of invasion the inhabitants of Lecce would barricade themselves in the square, with its conveniently narrow entrances. The 12th-century **cathedral** (☎ 0832 30 85 57; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 6.30am-noon & 4-6.30pm) is one of Giuseppe Zimbalo’s finest works – he was also responsible for the towering, 68m-high **bell tower**. The cathedral is unusual in that it has two façades, one on the western end and the other, more ornate, facing the piazza. It’s framed by the 15th-century **Palazzo Vescovile** (Episcopal Palace) and the 18th-century **Seminario** (☎ exhibitions only), designed by Giuseppe Cino.

ROMAN REMAINS

Below the level of the 1960s-dominated Piazza Sant’Oronzo is the restored 2nd-century-AD

Roman amphitheatre, discovered in 1901 by construction workers. It was excavated in the 1930s to reveal a perfect horseshoe with seating for 15,000. Nearby rises the **Colonna di Sant'Oronzo**, a statue of Lecce's patron saint, perched precariously on the second pillar from Via Appia – the Roman road that stretched from Rome to Brindisi (p699).

Nearby is a small Roman theatre that was also uncovered in the 1930s – a neat little arc hemmed between buildings. It contains the **Museo Teatro Romano** (☎ 0832 27 91 96; Via Ammirati; admission €2.60; 🕒 9.30am–1pm Mon–Sat), a small but worthwhile museum, with rooms full of ancient grotesque masks and russet-coloured Roman frescoes.

CHURCHES

On Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the interior of 17th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Irene** (🕒 8–11am & 4–6pm Mon–Sat), closed for renovation at time of writing, contains a magnificent pair of mirror-image baroque altarpieces, squaring up to each other across the transept. Other notable baroque churches include the last work of Giuseppe Zimbalo, **Chiesa del Rosario** (Via Giuseppe Libertini), also known as the Church of San Giovanni Battista. Instead of the intended dome roof, it ended up with a quick-fix wooded one following Zimbalo's death before the building was completed; **Chiesa di Santa Chiara** (Piazza Vittorio Emanuele; 🕒 9.30–11.30am daily, 4.30–6.30pm Mon–Sat), with every niche a swirl of twisting columns and ornate statuary; and, 200m to its south, the **Chiesa di San Matteo** (Via dei Perroni 29; 🕒 9am–12.30pm Tue–Sun, 4–7.30pm daily). The **Chiesa dei SS Nicolò e Cataldo** (Via San Nicola), near the Porta Napoli, was built by the Normans in 1180, then got caught up in the city's baroque frenzy and was revamped in 1716 by the prolific Cino, who retained the Romanesque rose window and portal.

OTHER SIGHTS

The **Museo Provinciale** (☎ 0832 68 35 03; Via Gallipoli 28; admission free; 🕒 9am–1.30pm & 2.30–7.30pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1.30pm Sun) stylishly covers 10,000 years of history, from Palaeolithic and Neolithic bits and bobs to a handsome display of Greek and Roman jewels, weaponry and ornaments. The stars of the show are the Messapians, who were making jaunty jugs and bowls centuries before the Greeks arrived to give them any pottery lessons. There are also some excellent temporary exhibitions.

Lecce's 16th-century **castle** (admission free; 🕒 9am–1pm & 4–8.30pm) was built around a 12th-century Norman tower to the orders of Charles V. It consists of two concentric trap-ezoidal structures. It's been used as a prison, a court, and military headquarters; now you can wander around and climb up on the roof.

Courses

Apulia Centre for Italian Language & Culture (☎ 0832 39 03 12; www.apuliodomus.com; Via Adriatica 10) An established school offering group or individual tuition in Italian for foreigners, this has good facilities and runs lots of activities.

Awaiting Table (www.awaitingtable.com) Silvestro Silvestori's splendid cooking and wine school provides short, weekend or week-long courses with lots of visits, tastings and special lecturers.

Sleeping

Lecce's burgeoning B&B scene offers the best-value accommodation.

Camping Namastè (☎ 0832 32 96 47; www.camping-lecce.it; Via Novoli; camp site per person/tent/car €5/8/8) Around 5km out of town is this 3.5 hectare pine-wood-shaded camp site, which forms part of an organic farm and runs yoga classes. Four-person bungalows (€50) and two-person apartments (€60) are also available. To get to Namastè take bus 26 from the train station.

Ostello della Gioventù (☎ 0832 65 08 90; Via Amerigo Vespucci 45; s/d/q €30/40/60, 3/4 person tent €10/16 plus per person €5) On the coast road, 8km from Lecce in San Cataldo, set among shady pines on the seafront. Take bus 32 from Lecce.

Casa Elisabetta (☎ 0832 30 70 52; www.beb-lecce.com; Via Vignes 15; s/d €30/55) An elegant mansion that's centred around a graceful courtyard, close to Piazza Sant'Oronzo, this has nice, stately rooms, and is efficient, well run and situated in the historic centre of town.

Centro Storico B&B (☎ 0832 24 27 27; www.bedandbreakfast.lecce.it; Via Vignes 2b; s €35–40, d €52–100; (P) (🚰)) The rooms and suites in this charming 16th-century hideaway are more comfy than the price suggests; several have star-vaulted ceilings and balconies. There's also a sunbathing terrace. The same family own Azzurreta B&B (☎ 0832 24 22 11; www.bblecce.it; single €30 to €38, double €55 to €70) in the same building.

our pick Bed Lecce (☎ 0832 24 61 19; www.bedlecce.com; Via dei Prioli & Via di Brienne; per person €35, apt €50–80) In the historic centre, these splendid apartments in lovely 16th- and 17th-century build-

ings are gorgeously decorated in white with flashes of colour. All have terraces. Feel like you've stepped into an issue of *Elle Decoration* for a bargain price.

B&B Centro Storico Prestige (☎ 0832 24 33 53; www.bbprestige-lecce.it; Via Santa Maria del Paradiso 4; s €60-70, d €70-90; (P) (Q)) In the historic centre, with tons of character. Rooms are light, airy and beautifully finished, with traditional furnishings and small balconies. There's also a pretty communal suntrap terrace with views over San Giovanni Battista.

Palazzo Rollo (☎ 0832 30 71 52; www.palazzorollo.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 14; d €90-120, 4-person studio €100) Stay in a 17th-century palace – the family seat for over 200 years. The three grand B&B suites (with kitchenettes) have high curved ceilings and chandeliers (Sciocco is particularly splendid). Downstairs, contemporary-chic studios open onto an ivy-hung courtyard.

Patria Palace Hotel (☎ 0832 24 51 11; www.patria.palacelecce.com; Piazzetta Riccardi 13; s/d €120/190; (P) (Q)) Smack bang in Lecce's barmy baroque territory, this option has comfortable rooms, each decorated differently, with murals. The location is wonderful, the bar gloriously Art Deco and full of polished wood, and the shady roof terrace has views over the Basilica di Santa Croce.

Eating

RESTAURANTS

Il Rifugio della Buona Stella (☎ 0832 30 42 97; Via Leonardo Prato 28; meals €15-20; (M) lunch daily, dinner Mon-Sat) Self-consciously rustic, with gingham and straw, wood and dolls decorating large arched rooms, this is friendly and popular and the simple local cooking is tasty.

Alle due Corti (☎ 0832 24 22 23; www.alleduecorti.com; Corte dei Giugni 1; meals €15-20) For a taste of sunny Salentina, this laid-back restaurant stands out. The menu is classic Pugliese with plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and homemade pasta; the rooms are whitewashed and cosy. A local favourite.

Mamma Lupa (☎ 340 7832765; Vico dei Tolomei; meals €15-20; (M) Tue-Sun) Looking and tasting rustic, at this *osteria* you can eat proper peasant food – such as roast tomatoes, potatoes and artichokes, or horse meatballs – in snug surroundings hung with herbs and open to the street.

Blu Notte (☎ 0832 30 42 86; Via Brancaccio 3; meals €30) Much recommended by locals, this has wonderful seafood if you have any room for

it after the spectacular antipasti. It's a relaxed, pretty place, just by Porta San Biaggio at the edge of the bar district, with outside tables.

Picton (☎ 0832 33 23 83; Via Idomeno 14; meals €35; (M) Tue-Sun) This beautiful backstreet restaurant is housed in an old *palazzo* with a cool barrel-vaulted interior and a refreshing inner garden. The cuisine is traditional with a twist, with dishes such as *saltimbocca* (veal dish with sage and prosciutto; meaning 'leap in the mouth').

Cucina Casareccia (☎ 0832 24 51 78; Viale Colonnello Archimede Costadura 19; meals €40; (M) lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Ring the bell to gain entry into the downstairs rooms of a house, and put yourself in the capable hands of charming Carmela Perrone. She'll whisk you through a dazzling array of Salentine dishes from the true *cucina povera* (cooking of the poor). Booking is a must.

Pick up your own ingredients at Lecce's fresh-produce **market** (Piazza Libertini; (M) mornings Mon-Sat).

CAFÉS & GELATERIE

Caffè Paisiello (☎ 0832 30 14 04; Via G Palmieri 72; (M) 7am-midnight) Popular with students, this high-ceilinged simple café has good pastries and a charmingly old-fashioned feel. There are some outside tables.

Il Caffè di Liberrima (☎ 0832 24 26 26; Corte dei Cicala; (M) 8am-1am) Tables fill the little square next to the bookshop on the central pedestrianised strip – an ideal place to watch the world amble past. Service is slow enough for the bookshop to come in handy.

Gelateria Natale (☎ 0832 25 60 60; Via Trinchese 7a; (M) 8am-1am) Lecce's best ice cream – you might have to queue but this will give you time to choose. It's also a fabulous confectioner, gleaming with jewel-like treats, truffles, *panna cotta* and dark chocolate cakes that pool like oil slicks on golden plates.

Drinking

Via Imperatore Augusto is full of bars, and on a summer's night feels like one long party. Wander along to find somewhere to settle. Otherwise, Il Caffè di Liberrima (above) is good for a drink.

Shopping

Lecce's streets are lined with pretty boutiques, well-stocked bookshops, cake shops and inviting delicatessens.

La Cartapesta (☎ 0832 24 34 10; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 27) Lecce is famous for its papier-mâché figures. You can buy handcrafted figurines (including a commemorative model of Pope John Paul II) in this, Claudio Riso's workshop.

La Bottega del Corso (☎ 0832 24 98 66; Via Giuseppe Libertini 52; ☎ 8.30am-1.15pm daily & 4.30-8.30pm Thu-Tue) A well-stocked deli full of typical produce and freshly baked breads.

Olio Claudio (☎ 0832 82 29 04; www.olioclaudio.com; Via Principi di Savoia 43) This small oil-packed shop is where to head for some classy olive oil. A litre starts from €3.50.

Getting There & Away

STP (☎ 0832 35 91 42) runs buses to Brindisi (€2.60, 45 minutes) throughout the Penisola Salentina, including Santa Maria di Leuca and Galatina, departing from Via Adua (although it's more convenient to travel by train).

FSE (☎ 0832 66 81 11) runs buses to Gallipoli (€2.20, one hour, four daily), Otranto (€2.20, one hour, two daily), Taranto (€4.70, two hours, frequent) and Brindisi (€2, 45 minutes, two daily), leaving from Via Torre del Parco. **Marozzi** (☎ 080 579 02 11) also has Otranto buses (€4).

Brindisi is 40km from Lecce by motorway and the SS7 leads to Taranto.

There are frequent trains to Bari (€8.60, 1½ to two hours), to Brindisi (€2.30, 20 to 30 minutes), to Rome (Eurostar 1st/2nd class €67/47, 6½ to 10 hours) and Bologna (Eurostar €76/57, 7½ to 9½ hours). For Naples (€52/38, 5½ hours), change in Caserta.

FSE trains head to Otranto and Martina Franca.

PENISOLA SALENTINA

The Penisola Salentina (Salentine Peninsula) is hot, dry and remote, retaining a flavour of its Greek past. Here the lush greenery of Valle d'Itria gives way to ochre-coloured fields, hazy with wild flowers in spring, and endless olive groves. The sun-bleached towns are shuttered and hushed, only coming alive in the summer months.

Galatina

pop 27,700

With a charming historic centre, Galatina – 18km south of Lecce – is at the core of Salento's Greek past. It is almost the only place where the ritual *tarantismi* (a frenzied dance

meant to rid the body of tarantula-bite poison) is still practised. The tarantella folk dance evolved from it, and each year on the feast day of St Peter and St Paul (29 June), the ritual is performed at the (now deconsecrated) church.

However, most people come to see the incredible 14th-century **Basilica di Santa Caterina d'Alessandria** (☎ 8am-12.30pm & 4.30-6.45pm Apr-Sep, 8am-12.30pm & 3.45-5.45pm Oct-Mar), its interior a kaleidoscope of fresco. It was built by the Franciscans, whose patroness was Frenchwoman Marie d'Enghien de Brienne. Married to Raimondello Orsini del Balzo, the Salentine's wealthiest noble, she had plenty of cash to splash on interior decoration. The gruesome story goes that Raimondello (who's buried here) climbed Mt Sinai to visit relics of Santa Caterina (St Catherine). Kissing the dead saint's hand, he bit off a finger and brought it back as a holy relic.

The church is absolutely beautiful, with a pure-white altarpiece set against the frenzy of frescoes. Bring a torch. It is not clear who the artists Marie employed really were; they could have been itinerant painters down from Le Marche and Emilia, or southerners who'd absorbed the latest Renaissance innovations on trips north.

If you want to stop overnight try city-centre gem **Hotel Palazzo Baldi** (☎ 0836 56 83 45; www.hotelpalazzobaldi.com in Italian; Via Corte Baldi 2; s/d from €60/100) in Galatina's historic heart, a bijoux 16th-century palace with elegant, romantic rooms.

FSE runs regular trains between Galatina and Lecce (€1.30, 30 minutes, hourly).

OTRANTO

pop 5500

Entering Otranto's walled historic centre feels like entering a fortress. Great golden walls guard narrow car-free lanes, protecting countless pretty little shops selling touristic odds and ends. In July and August it's one of Puglia's most popular haunts, with excited holidaymakers providing a packed-out carnival atmosphere. Much is closed in the low season.

Otranto was an important town. It was Italy's main port to the Orient for a thousand years, and suffered a brutal history. There are fanciful tales that King Minos was here and St Peter is supposed to have celebrated the first Western Mass here.

A more definite historical event is the Sack of Otranto in 1480, when 18,000 Turks besieged the town and killed 800 faithful Christians who refused to convert.

Today, the only fright you'll get is the summer crush on Otranto's scenic beaches and in its narrow streets.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0836 80 14 36; Piazza Castello; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) faces the castle.

Sights & Activities

Don't leave Otranto without visiting the Romanesque **cathedral** (☹ 8am-noon daily, 3-7pm Apr-Sep, 3-5pm Oct-Mar), built by the Normans in the 11th century, though given a few facelifts since. A vast 12th-century mosaic covers its floor, a stupendous tree of life balanced on the back of two elephants. It was created by a young monk called Pantaleone (who had obviously never seen an elephant), whose vision of heaven and hell encompassed an amazing (con)fusion of the classics, religion and plain old superstition, including Adam and Eve, Diana the huntress, Hercules, King Arthur, Alexander the Great, and a menagerie of monkeys, snakes and sea monsters.

It's amazing that the cathedral survived at all, as the Turks stabled their horses here when they beheaded the martyrs of Otranto on a stone now preserved in the altar of the chapel to the right of the main altar. This Cappella Mortiri (Chapel of the Dead) is a ghoulishly fascinating sight, with the skulls of the martyrs arranged in neat patterns in glass cases.

Within the tiny **Chiesa di San Pietro** (☹ 10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Apr-Sep, 10am-noon & 3-6pm Oct-Mar) are more vivid Byzantine frescoes. It is signposted off the *corso*. If it's closed, ask for the key at the cathedral.

The Aragonese **castle** (Piazza Castello; admission free except during exhibitions; ☹ 9am-11pm Jun-Sep, 9am-noon & 4-8pm Oct-May), at the eastern edge of town beside the port, is a squat, thick-walled fort, with the Charles V coat of arms above the entrance. As you wander round, you might want to dip into Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, the first ever Gothic novel.

There are some great beaches near Otranto: Lido di Otranto has a Blue Flag seal of approval. Baia dei Turchi is the area's most renowned beach, about 3km north of town and famous for its velvet-soft sand and powder-blue-pale sea. There's currently a campaign to prevent a restaurant being built on the beach.

The clear waters and rocky coast around here are good for diving, and **Scuba Diving Otranto** (☎ 0836 80 27 40; www.scubadiving.it; Via S Francesco di Paola 43) offers day or night dives as well as introductory dives and courses.

You can also study Italian here at **Otranto nel Mondo** (☎ 0836 80 20 03; www.otrantonelmondo.com) over the summer. The courses involve lots of extracurricular fun such as horse-riding, sailing and wine-tasting.

Sleeping

Otranto (and down the coast as far as Santa Maria di Leuca) is a good area for self-catering accommodation (see p694 for suggested websites).

Balconcino d'Oriente (☎ 0836 80 15 29; www.balconcinodoriente.com; Via San Francesco da Paola 71; s €35-60, d €50-100; ☹) A friendly B&B in a great location near the castle. They've taken the Eastern theme seriously here, as you can see from the colourful bed linens, Oriental pictures, Moroccan lamps and orange colour washes on the walls. The best room has a small terrace overlooking the castle ramparts.

Hotel Albània (☎ /fax 0836 80 18 77; www.hotelalbania.com; Via S Francesco di Paola 10; s/d €70/120; ☹) A white, modernist block opposite the Otranto channel, this has modern, sleek businesslike rooms that seem a bit at odds with Otranto's holiday vibe, but are comfortable. Unfortunately due to its position, only the suite has a sea view.

our pick Palazzo de Mori (☎ /fax 0836 80 10 88; www.palazzodemori.it; Bastione dei Pelasgi; s €80-100, d €100-150; ☹ Jan-Oct; ☹) Finally, an intimate hotel of real character in Otranto's historic centre. Enjoy a breakfast of fruits and yoghurt on the sun terrace overlooking the port and in the afternoon retire for a siesta in one of the soothing white-on-white rooms.

our pick Masseria Montelauro (☎ 0836 80 62 03; www.masseriamontelauro.it; Strada Otranto-Uggiano; s €125-160, d €155-270, ste €210-350; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) Masseria Montelauro was a farm complex and now is serenely gorgeous, with 27 rustic yet luxurious rooms decorated in shades of romantic white. The infinity pool is a clear blue square in the inner courtyard and there is an excellent restaurant that uses the freshest ingredients.

Eating & Drinking

Two splendid pizzerias are **La Botte** (☎ 0836 80 42 93; Via del Porto) on the road leading from the port, with a simple interior and some outside

tables, and **La Cala dei Normanni** (☎ 0836 80 11 27; Via Lungomare) on the seafloor.

Da Sergio (☎ 0836 80 14 08; Corso Garibaldi 9; meals €30) Smart, chic and favoured by locals, this is Otranto's best fish restaurant, where jolly yellow tables are counterbalanced by a rather refined atmosphere. It's right on the *corso*.

You can drink at bars along the city wall, overlooking the sea. A popular bar serving *aperitivo* and snacks is **Il Covo dei Mori** (☎ 0836 80 20 33; Via Leon Dari). In summer there are clubs, like Atlantis, set up along the nearby beaches.

Getting There & Away

Otranto can be reached from Lecce by FSE train (€2.60, one hour), or by bus (€4, 50 minutes).

Marozzi (☎ 0836 80 15 78) also serves Lecce (€4.50, one hour, two daily), departing from the port, and on to Rome (€43, 10½ hours).

For travel information and reservations, head to **Ellade Viaggi** (☎ 0836 80 15 78; www.elladeviaggi.it in Italian; Via del Porto) at the port.

AROUND OTRANTO

The road south from Otranto takes you along a wild coastline. The land here is rocky and dramatic, with cliffs falling down into the sparkling sea. When the wind is up you can see why it is largely treeless. Many of the towns here started life as Greek settlements, although there are few monuments to be seen. When you reach the resort town of **Santa Maria di Leuca**, you've reached the tip of Italy's stiletto and the dividing line between the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. The Ionian side of the Penisola Salentina has some good beaches. There are few cheap hotels in the area but this is a good place to seek out self-catering villas, and camp sites around along the coast – try **Camping Maggiano** (☎ 0832 34 06 86; www.campingportomiggiano.it; 2-person tent €13-18, car €2-2.50; ☹ Jun-Sep), 16km south of Otranto. It's on the cliff-top and is olive-tree shaded, with steps down to the beach.

To mingle with the beautiful people, drive down to sea-edge **Gibò** (☎ 0833 54 89 79; www.gibo.it; Loc Ponte Ciolo). One of the region's most beautiful nightspots, on a terraced site above the coast, Gibò has a thronged restaurant and bar and live music in summer.

GALLIPOLI

pop 20,900

Gallipoli (from 'beautiful town' in Greek) is an almost-island. The old medieval centre fills

an island in the Ionian Sea, connected by a bridge to the mainland and modern city. An important fishing centre, it's 39km southwest of Lecce, and has a history of strong-willed independence, being the last Salentine settlement to succumb to the Normans in the 11th century. It still feels like a town, unlike more seasonal coastal places. It's a charming place, and in summer bars and restaurants make the most of the island's ramparts, looking out to sea.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 0833 26 25 29; Piazza Imbriani 9; ☹ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Tue & Thu, longer hours in summer) is over the bridge at the edge of the old town.

Sights

The medieval town's entrance is guarded by an Angevin **castle**. Just opposite, below the ramp leading to the island, is a small but happening **fish market**.

In the centre, on the highest point of the island, is the 17th-century baroque **Cattedrale di Sant'Agata** (☎ 0833 26 19 87; Via Antonietta de Pace; ☹ hours vary), lined with paintings by local artists. Zimbalo, who imprinted Lecce with his crazy baroque styles (p704), also worked on the façade. Nearby, look out for **Farmacia Provenzana** (Via Antonietta de Pace; ☹ 8.30am-1pm & 4.30-8.30pm), a beautifully decorated pharmacy dating from 1814. Further west is the small **Museo Civico 'e Barba'** (☎ 0833 26 42 24; Via Antonietta de Pace 108; admission €1; ☹ 10am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat, 4-7pm Sun), founded in 1878, a 19th-century time capsule featuring fish heads, ancient sculptures, a 3rd-century BC sarcophagus and other weird stuff.

Back over the bridge and in the modern part of town is the **Fontana Antica**. Reconstructed in the 16th century from a Greek original, this fountain's much-weathered sculptured figures tell a steamy tale of incest and bestiality.

Sleeping & Eating

Our pick **La Casa del Mare** (☎ 0833 26 13 68; www.lacasadelmare.com; Piazza de Amicis 14; d €50-100; ☑) A butter-coloured 16th-century building on a little town square in the town centre, overlooking a statue of a cheery Padre Pio (p681), this is a good choice, with plain but bright white-walled rooms.

B&B La Riviera (☎ 0833 26 10 96; www.bedandbreakfastlariviera.com; d €60-120; ☹) All rooms have sea

views, as the building faces out from the edge of the old town. The corridors have murals and the rooms are decorated with wooden antique furniture. It's the kind of place you could imagine elegant, impecunious, maiden aunts coming on holiday for the sea air.

Masseria Don Cirillo (☎ 0832 30 35 06; www.masseriadoncirillo.it; Torre San Giovanni, Ugento; d €70-125; ☹ Apr-Oct) Around 15km from Gallipoli, this is an elegant *masseria*, its furnishings a chic mix of modern and rustic, its rooms arched in pale stone, all surrounded by greenery and with a great big pool for lounging.

Relais Corte Palmieri (☎ 0833 26 25 63; www.relaiscortepalmieri.it; Corte Palmieri 3; s €90-170, d €120-200) A creamy-coloured well-kept hotel, run by the same management as Palazzo del Corso (see below) and the equally good Palazzo Mosco Inn B&B (see the website) with bright, light rooms just off the sea road in the old town.

Palazzo del Corso (☎ 0833 26 40 40; www.hotelpalazzo delcorso.it; Corso Roma 145; d €150-350; ☹ ☒) A gem on the *corso* outside the old town, housed in a 19th-century mansion, this has sunny, gorgeous rooms, suites worth splashing out on and a roof garden overlooking the tiny marina, where you can lounge on your sun bed before having a dip in the hydromassage tub!

Il Bastione (☎ 0833 26 38 36; Riviera N Sauro 28; meals €30) On the old sea wall overlooking the beach, this restaurant is a good place for fish, which you can enjoy on the panoramic roof terrace.

La Puritate (☎ 0833 26 42 05; Via S Elia 18; meals €45; ☹ Thu-Tue) A great place for seafood in the old town. Follow the excellent antipasti with delicious *primi* (first courses) such as seafood spaghetti, then see what's been caught that day – the swordfish is usually a good bet.

Getting There & Away

FSE buses and trains head to Lecce (€2.10, one hour, four daily).

TARANTO

pop 199,000

Men in wellies selling fish on corners, a collapsing historic medieval centre and an industrial horror show (with the worst emissions in the country) – Taranto's distinctive characteristics protect an interesting, rough heart.

The city has lately made the news for all the wrong reasons. The city administration collapsed in 2007 after €357 million disappeared.

This is all a far cry from Taranto's glamorous history. Founded in the 7th century BC by exiles from Sparta, the city was christened Taras and became one of the wealthiest and most important colonies of Magna Graecia, with a peak population of 300,000. The fun finished, however, in the 3rd century BC when the Romans marched in, changed its name to Tarentum and set off a two-millennia decline in fortunes.

Taranto, along with La Spezia, is Italy's major naval base, and the presence of young sailors is emblematic of a city that has always looked to the sea. Apparently the first cat landed on European shores here.

Orientation & Information

Taranto neatly splits into three. The old town is on a tiny island, lodged between the north-west port and train station and the new city to the southeast. Italy's largest steel plant occupies the city's entire western half. The grid-patterned new city contains the banks, most hotels and restaurants, and the **tourist office** (☎ 099 453 23 97; Corso Umberto I 113; ☹ 9am-1pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat).

Sights

CITTÀ VECCHIA

Taranto's medieval town centre has a gritty atmosphere of deep decay. You can only wonder how long it might all remain standing.

It's perched on the small island dividing the Mar Piccolo (Small Sea; an enclosed lagoon) and the Mar Grande (Big Sea). This peculiar geography means that blue sea and sky surround you wherever you go. Guarding the swing bridge that joins the old and new parts of town, the 15th-century **Castello Aragonese** (☎ 099 775 34 38; ☹ by appointment 9am-noon) is an impressive structure, currently occupied by the Italian navy. Opposite, you will see the remaining columns of what was once Taranto's **Temple of Poseidon**. Legend has it that Taras his son founded the city when he rode into its harbour on the back of a dolphin.

Buried in the old town is the 11th-century **cathedral** (Via del Duomo), one of Puglia's oldest Romanesque buildings and an extravagant treat. It's dedicated to San Cataldo; the Capella do Sam Cataldo is a baroque riot of frescoes and polychrome marble inlay.

Taranto's real essence lies in its fabulous **fish markets** on Via Cariati.

NEW TOWN

Taranto's urbane new town is a pleasant surprise, with sleek shopping streets shooting off from the impressive palm-planted Piazza Garibaldi, which is dominated by the gigantic rust-red 1920s **Palazzo del Governo**.

Sadly the **Museo Nazionale** (☎ 099 453 21 12; Corso Umberto I 41) is in a less impressive state, undergoing interminable renovations. This is a real shame, as it's one of Italy's most important archaeological museums, and houses, among other ancient artefacts, an impressive collection of antique gold jewellery. You can get some idea of its scandalously hidden treasures by visiting the temporary display in the old town's **Palazzo Pantaleo** (☎ 099 471 84 92; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II; adult/child €2/1; 🕒 8.30am-

7.30pm), featuring 1st-century-BC glassware and ancient jewellery such as a 4th-century-BC bronze and terracotta crown.

Tours

Valigia Travel (☎ 099 459 43 74; www.valigiatravel.it; Corso Umberto I 139a) is a travel agency offering some great day trips, such as a two-hour boat tour (€7 per person), guided archaeological tour (including the museum; €20 per person; minimum two people), and numerous tours in the surrounding province.

Festivals & Events

Taranto is famous for its **Le Feste di Pasqua** (Holy Week) celebrations – the biggest in the region – when bearers in Ku Klux Klan-style



robes carry icons around the town. There are three processions: the Perdoni, celebrating pilgrims; the Addolorata (which lasts 12 hours but covers only 4km); and the Misteri (even slower at 14 hours to cover 2km).

Sleeping

Hotel Pisani (☎ 099 453 40 87; fax 099 470 75 93; Via Cavour 43; s/d €25/46) The best budget option, in the new town, tucked off the main square. Rooms are fine if sometimes a bit gloomy, with small bathrooms.

Ostello della Gioventù La Locanda (☎ 099 476 00 33; www.ostellolocalocanda.it; Vico Civitanova; dm €20, s/d €30/60) This cheap-as-chips, very spartan youth hostel in the old town is in a tiny alley near Piazza Fontana.

Europa Residence Hotel (☎ 099 452 59 94; www.hoteleuropaonline.it; Via Roma 2; s/d €80/105; ♿) On the seafront, looking over to the old town, this is right next to the swing bridge. A hotel since 1888, it's 19th-century on the outside and business-oriented and smart on the inside.

Hotel Akropolis (☎ 099 470 41 10; www.hotellakropolis.it; Vico I Seminario 3; s €90-105, d €135-160; ♿) A converted medieval *palazzo* in the crumbling old town, this swanky hotel beside the cathedral feels out of place. There are 13 stylish cream-and-white rooms with Jacuzzis and original tiled floors, and tremendous views from the hotel's terrace.

Eating & Drinking

Taranto's restaurants are hidden like pearls amid its decrepit streets. It has been famous for its seafood – especially shellfish – since antiquity.

Caffè Italiano (☎ 099 452 17 81; Via D'Aquino 86a; salads & snacks €4; ☎ 5am-2am) Swish as you might wish, this is a Taranto hot spot, an uber-chromed café with excellent snacks, coffee and ice cream, and outside seating on the pedestrianised street.

Il Porto (☎ 099 476 48 86; Via Porto 8 Molo Sant Eligro; meals €25; ☎ Wed-Mon) A local favourite and just a splash of a tail from the fish market, this is a popular place housed under the barrel arches of a spacious cellar. It has some outside tables, and serves typical Tarantine cooking.

San Domenico (☎ 099 470 47 86; Via Duomo 7; meals €30) A small white-arched, bottle-lined cellar with outdoor tables in the neighbouring square, this has wonderful seafood, and the mixed antipasti is particularly worth setting aside an afternoon to get through.

Al Gatto Rosso (☎ 099 452 98 75; Via Cavour 2; meals €35; ☎ Tue-Sun) Running since 1952, this is a relaxed and unpretentious trattoria on the edge of the new town. It's got lots of class – weighty white tablecloths, wine glasses you could swim in, and great smells from the kitchen.

Getting There & Around

Buses heading north and west depart from Porto Mercantile; those going south and east leave from Via Magnaghi in the new city. Note there are fewer services on Sunday.

FSE (☎ 800 07 90 80) buses go to Bari (€4.60, two hours, eight daily). Infrequent **SITA** (☎ 899 32 52 04; www.sitabus.it in Italian) buses leave from Porto Mercantile for Matera. **STP** (☎ 0832 22 44 11) and FSE buses go to Lecce (€2.60, two hours, five daily).

Marozzi (☎ 080 579 90 111) has express services serving Rome's Stazione Tiburtina (€35.50, six hours, four daily). **Marino Autolinee** (☎ 080 311 23 35) runs overnight to Milan (€46, 11 hours, one daily). **Autolinee Miccolis** (☎ 099 470 44 51) serves Naples (€18, four hours, three daily) via Potenza (€9.50, two hours).

Buy tickets for buses and boats at **Ausiello di Sude Viaggi** (Corso Umberto I; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-8pm).

It's preferable to travel by train on long-distance routes. Both **Trenitalia** (☎ 89 20 21) and **FSE** (☎ 099 471 59 01) trains go to Brindisi (€4, 1¼ hours, frequent) and Bari (€6.80, 1¼ hours, frequent), as well as Naples (1st/2nd class €32/24, 4½ hours, five daily) and Rome (€56/38, six to 7½ hours, five daily).

AMAT (☎ 099 452 67 32) buses 1/2, 3 and 8 run between the train station and the new city.

There is metered parking in the Piazza Garibaldi.

BASILICATA

Basilicata has an otherworldly landscape of tremendous mountain ranges, dark forested valleys and villages so melded with the rock-face that they seem to have grown there.

Since the 1930s this land has been inseparable from the name of writer Carlo Levi. His superb book *Christ Stopped at Eboli* documented the harsh life of Basilicata's poverty-stricken peasants, and even its title suggests that Basilicata was beyond the hand of God. The discovery of Western Europe's largest oilfield 30km south of Potenza in 1996, should have altered the view of Basilicata as a poor

wild region beyond commercial development, but the stereotype lingers.

However, today Basilicata's remote atmosphere and tremendous landscape is attracting the attention of travellers. *The Passion of Christ* – the gospel according to Mel Gibson – brought the extraordinary *sassi* (stone houses) of Matera to the world's attention, while Maratea is one of Italy's most chic seaside resorts. The purple-hued mountains of the interior are impossibly grand, a wonderful destination for naturalists, particularly the soaring peaks of the Lucanian Apennines and the Parco Nazionale del Pollino.

History

Basilicata spans Italy's instep with slivers of coastline touching the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas. It was known to the Greeks and Romans as Lucania (a name still heard today) after the Lucani tribe who lived here as far back as the 5th century BC. The Greeks also prospered here, settling along the coastline at Metapontum and Erakleia, but things started to go wrong under the Romans, when Hannibal, the ferocious Carthaginian general, rampaged through the region.

In the 10th century, the Byzantine Emperor, Basilikòs (976–1025) renamed the area, overthrowing the Saracens in Sicily and the south and reintroducing Christianity. The pattern of war and overthrow continued throughout the Middle Ages as the Normans, Hohenstaufens, Angevins and the Bourbons constantly tussled over its strategic location right up until the 19th century. As talk of the Italian unification began to gain ground in the 19th century, Bourbon-sponsored loyalists took to Basilicata's mountains to oppose political change. Ultimately they became the much-feared bandits of local lore who make scary appearances in writings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Norman Douglas, Craufurd Ramage and George Gissing – Basilicata's earliest tourists. In the 1930s, Basilicata was used as a kind of open prison for political dissidents – most famously Carlo Levi – sent into exile to remote villages by the fascists.

TYRRHENIAN COAST

Resembling a mini-Amalfi, Basilicata's Tyrrhenian coast is short (about 20km) but sweet. Squeezed between Calabria and Campania's Cilento peninsula, it shares the same beguiling

characteristics: hidden coves and pewter sandy beaches backed by majestic coastal cliffs. The SS18 threads a spectacular route along the mountains to the coast's star attraction, the charming seaside settlements of Maratea.

Maratea

pop 5300

Maratea feels rather like a sophisticated Italian version of Cornwall. Dramatic hills, cliffs, and beaches line the sparkling Gulf of Policastro, which is studded with charming towns and elegant hotels. Its attraction is no secret: it's packed in summer and you'll need to book ahead. Conversely, many hotels and restaurants close from October to March.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Maratea is a jumbled collection of communities, each with its own character. There's the pretty **Porto di Maratea**, clustered around its tiny harbour, where sleek yachts and bright-blue fishing boats bob in the water, overlooked by a muddle of colourful houses framed by rich green cypress forests. Then there's the enchanting 13th-century medieval *borgo* (small town) of **Maratea Inferiore**, with pint-sized piazzas, wriggling alleys and interlocking houses, offering startling coastal views. It's all overlooked by a 21m-high, gleaming white statue of Christ the Redeemer – if you have your own transport don't miss the rollercoaster road and stupendous views from the statue-mounted summit – below which lie the ruins of **Maratea Superiore**, all that remains of the original 8th-century-BC Greek colony.

The deep green hillsides that encircle this tumbling conurbation offer excellent walking trails and there are a number of easy day trips to the surrounding hamlets of the **Acquafredda di Maratea** and **Fiumicello**, with a wide sandy beach. You will find the **tourist office** (☎ 0973 87 69 08; Piazza Gesù 40; ☹ 8am–2pm & 4–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm & 5–8pm Sun Jul & Aug, shorter hours Sep–Jun) in Fiumicello.

Centro Sub Maratea (☎ 0973 87 00 13; Contrada Santa Caterina 28, Maratea) offers diving courses, while **Maratea Mare Service** (☎ 0973 87 69 76; Porto di Maratea) rents boats.

A worthwhile day trip via car is to pretty **Rivello** (elevation 479m). Perched on a high hill overlooking the Noce river, it has an interesting Byzantine history evident in the tiny tiled cupolas and frescoes of its gorgeous churches.

SLEEPING

Maratea is one of the most stylish resorts in the south, with accommodation to match and a Blue Flag stamp of approval for its beaches.

B&B Nefer (☎ 0973 87 18 28; www.bbnefer.it; Via Cersuta; s/d €50/60; (P)) A B&B set in a small hamlet 5km northwest of Maratea, with two attractive rooms opening onto a small garden that overlooks the sea. The morning *cornetti* (croissants) are good. From here you can walk along narrow seaside paths to a dramatic small, black-sanded beach.

Hotel Villa Cheta Elite (☎ 0973 87 81 34; www.villacheta.it; Via Timpane 46; d €90-125; (M) May-Oct; (P) ♻) A charming Art Nouveau villa in the hamlet of Acquafredda. The broad terrace commands spectacular views, and as one-time home to the aristocratic Morsicano family, the rooms retain their faded antique charm. There's also a fabulous restaurant (meals €50).

Locanda delle Donne Monache (☎ 0973 87 74 87; www.mondomaratea.it; Via Mazzei 4; d €120-230; (M) May-Oct; (P) ♻) Overlooking the medieval *borgo*, this discreet place is a converted convent with a wonderfully high-up setting. It's a

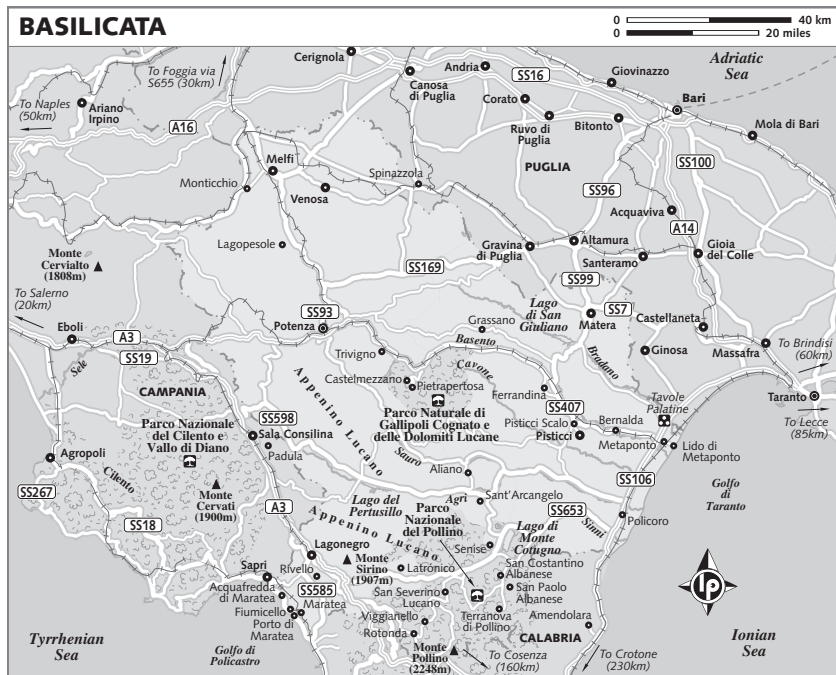
hotchpotch of vaulted corridors, terraces and gardens. The rooms are elegantly decorated in pastel shades and many have quaint wrought-iron balconies.

EATING

La Bussola (☎ 0973 87 68 63; Via Santavenera 43; pizzas €10; (M) 9.30am-11.30pm) A popular, no-nonsense, and welcoming small-scale pizzeria in Fiumicello, with bargain-priced wood-baked pizzas – eat in or take away.

Za Mariuccia (☎ 0973 87 61 63; Via Grotte 2; meals €30; (M) dinner Jun-Sep, dinner Fri & Sat Apr & May) In Porto Maratea, tables here overlook the sea and you can eat fresh fish served up in every way imaginable – in risottos, pastas, *crudo* (raw) and simply filleted and fried. There's an excellent wine list.

Taverna Rovita (☎ 0973 87 65 88; Via Rovita 13; meals €35; (M) Wed-Mon mid-Mar-Dec) This tavern is just off Maratea Inferiore's main piazza. Rovita is excellent value and specialises in hearty local fare, with Lucanian specialities involving stuffed peppers, game birds, local salami and fine seafood. To finish try cassata Lucana, a local version of the Sicilian ricotta sweet.



GETTING THERE & AWAY

SITA (☎ 0971 50 68 11; www.sitabus.it in Italian) buses run to Potenza, up the coast to Sapri in Campania and south to Praia a Mare in Calabria. Local buses (€0.80) connect the coastal towns and Maratea train station with Maratea Inferiore, running frequently in summer. Intercity and regional trains on the Rome–Reggio line stop at Maratea train station, below the town.

PARCO NAZIONALE DEL POLLINO

Italy's largest national park, the **Pollino National Park** (www.parcopollino.it), straddling Basilicata and Calabria, acts like a rocky curtain separating the region from the rest of Italy. It has the richest repository of flora and fauna in the south, and covers 1960 sq km.

The park's most spectacular areas are the central Pollino Massif (2267m), and the Monti di Orsomarso (1987m), in the southwest (in Calabria). These sheer mountains, often snow-bound, are blanketed by forests of oak, alder, maple, beech, pine and fir which filter the harsh southern sun and protect the delicately budding peonies and orchids that set the land ablaze after the snow melts. The park is most famous, however, for its ancient *pino loricato* trees, which are only found here and in the Balkans. The oldest specimens reach 40m in height and their scaly, grey trunks look like sculptures against the huge bald rocks.

Walkers in the park can enjoy varied landscapes, from deep river canyons to alpine meadows, and the park still protects a rare stock of roe deer, wild cats, wolves, birds of prey including the golden eagle and Egyptian vulture, and the endangered otter, *Lutra lutra*.

The SS653 cuts across the park and is the best route if you want to explore unique Albanian villages such as **San Paolo Albanese** and **San Costantino Albanese**. These isolated and unspoilt communities fiercely maintain their mountain culture and the Greek liturgy is retained in the main churches. They're a great place to buy rare local handicrafts – wooden crafts in **Terranova di Pollino**, alabaster in **Latronico** and wrought iron in **Sant'Arcangelo**.

For the Calabrian part of the park, see p722.

Orientation & Information

The park's main centre is **Rotonda** (elevation 626m), which is accessible from the A3 and

SS19. Here you will find the official park office, **Ente Parco Nazionale del Pollino** (☎ 0973 66 93 11; Via delle Frece Tricolori 6; ☎ 8am–2pm Mon–Fri, 3–5.30pm Mon & Wed). For an English-speaking guide, contact Giuseppe Cosenza at Asklepios (see below), who arranges trekking trips (from personalised programmes to family treks), mountain biking and rafting (one hour/four hours €15/50). For more information see the Asklepios website. **Pollino Info Point** (www.ferulaviaggi.it) is run by Ferula Viaggi (opposite) based in Matera, and provides information, including nature and culture, on the area. Ferula Viaggio also runs trips, mountain-bike excursions and treks into the Pollino.

The *Carta Excursionistica del Pollino Lucano* (scale 1:50000), produced by the Basilicata tourist board, is a useful driving map. You should be able to find a copy at the tourist offices in Rotonda, Matera or Maratea. The large-scale *Parco Nazionale del Pollino* map available at the Rotonda park office and from Ferula Viaggi shows all the main routes and includes some useful information on the park, its flora and fauna and the park communities. Both maps are free. You can also buy the *Parco Nazionale del Pollino settore centro-settentrionale* (central-north region) map (1:55.000; €6) from <http://ecommerce.escursionista.it>.

Sleeping & Eating

Asklepios (☎ 0973 66 92 90; www.asklepios.it; Contrada Barone 9; s/d €25/50) This modern place with simple rooms has a rural setting a few kilometres outside Rotonda. It's the place to stay for walkers as it's run by Giuseppe Cosenza, one of the few English-speaking guides in the Pollino. Advance booking is advisable. Asklepios is linked to the similiar *agriturismi* Agriturismo Civarra (☎ 0973 669152) and Agriturismo Calivino (☎ 0973 661688), both of which have great views. You can arrange trekking or rafting from all three places, and they offer special activity packages (see p717 for details).

Picchio Nero (☎ 0973 9 31 70; www.picchionero.com; Via Mulino 1; s/d €50/67; ☎) The chalet-style Picchio Nero in Terranova di Pollino, with its Austrian-style wooden balconies, is the most popular hotel for hikers. It's family-run, cosy and friendly, has a nice garden, and can help arrange excursions. It also has a renowned restaurant (meals €35).

Luna Rossa (☎ 0973 932 54; Via Marconi 18; meals €35; ☞ Thu-Tue) In Terranova di Pollino, Luna Rossa is very highly regarded, with outstanding and creative local specialities cooked simply and with real flair, served in a rustic wood-panelled setting.

Da Peppe (☎ 0973 66 12 51; Corso Garibaldi 13; meals €35; ☞ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue & Thu-Sun) In Rotonda, this is a winner, with wonderful local meat and woodland products such as truffles and mushrooms, served in a cosy converted townhouse.

Getting There & Away

It's difficult to navigate the park without your own vehicle. Bus services are limited and almost nonexistent outside high summer.

MATERA

pop 58,300 / elev 405m

Matera is surely Italy's most extraordinary town. A sable- and granite-coloured patchwork of buildings tops two dizzying ravines. Its famous *sassi* (stone houses carved out of the caves and cliffs) were once the scene of terrible poverty, with overcrowded caves home to livestock and their owners – one of modern Italy's great scandals. It's easy to see why Mel Gibson chose this cave-pocked, torn and craggy setting to film *The Passion of Christ*.

History

Matera is said to be one of the world's oldest towns. The simple natural grottoes that dotted the gorge were adapted to become homes. In time, an ingenious system of canals regulated the flow of water and sewage, and small hanging gardens lent splashes of colour. The prosperous town became the capital of Basilicata in 1663, a position it held until 1806 when the power moved to Potenza. In the decades that followed, an unsustainable increase in population led to the habitation of unsuitable grottoes – originally intended as animal stalls – even lacking running water.

By the 1950s over half of Matera's population lived in the *sassi*, a typical cave sheltering an average of six children. The infant mortality rate was 50%. In his *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Carlo Levi describes how children would beg passers-by for quinine to stave off the deadly malaria. Such publicity finally galvanised the authorities into action, and in the late 1950s about 15,000 inhabitants were forcibly relocated to new government housing schemes.

In 1993 the *sassi* were declared a Unesco World Heritage Site. Ironically, the town's history of outrageous misery has transformed it into Basilicata's leading tourist attraction.

Orientation

A short walk down Via Roma from the train and bus stations off Piazza Matteotti brings you to the Piazza Vittorio Veneto, the town's pedestrianised heart. The two *sassi* ravines open up to its east and southeast.

MAPS

The *sassi* are quite a tangle, but it's not difficult to find your way around. Arm yourself with the map *Matera: Percorsi Turistici* (€1.50), available from various kiosks and hotels around town, which describes in English and Italian five itineraries through the *sassi*.

The tourist office has a map (in Italian) of excursions in the Parco della Murgia Materana, showing some routes around the gorge.

Information

Basilicata Turistica (www.aptbasilicata.it)

Ferula Viaggi (☎ 0835 33 65 72; www.materaturismo.it; Via Cappellutti 34; ☞ 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat) A fab tourist cooperative and travel agency dedicated to promoting Basilicata. It runs great tours (see p177 for more details), and tours in the Pollino (see opposite).

Hospital (☎ 0835 25 31 11; Via Montescaglioso) About 1km southeast of the centre.

Internet point (☎ 0835 34 61 12; Piazza Vittorio Veneto 49; per hr €3; ☞ 8am-1pm Tue-Sat & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat)

Parco Archeologico Storico Naturale delle Chiese Rupestri del Materano (☎ 0835 33 61 66; www.parcocomurgia.it; Via Sette Dolori) For info on the Murgia park.

Police station (☎ 0835 37 81; Piazza Vittorio Veneto)

Post office (Via del Corso 1; ☞ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat)

Sassi Tourism (☎ 0835 31 94 58; www.sassitourism.it; Via Bruno Buozzi 141 or Via Lucana 238) Tourism organisation offering tours around Matera as well as entry into sites (see p176).

Sassiweb (www.sassiweb.it) Extensive, informative website with hotels, tours, history and fascinating images.

Tourist information kiosk (☎ 0835 24 12 60; Via Madonna delle Virtù, Piazza Matteotti & Via Lucana; ☞ 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-7pm summer) Run by the Comune di Matera, offers guided tours and tickets for entry to churches.

Tourist office (☎ 0835 33 19 83/0835 33 18 17; www.materaturismo.it; Via Spine Bianche; ☞ 9am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Helpful.

Sassi Tourism (see p715) operates entry into five churches, including Santa Maria d'Idris, several others set in the *sassi* and an ex-monastery. Tickets cost €2.50/5/6 for one site/three sites/all the sites.

The *sassi* are accessible from several points. There's an entrance off Piazza Vittorio Veneto, or take Via delle Beccherie to Piazza del Duomo and follow the tourist itinerary signs to enter either Barisano or Caveoso. Sasso Caveoso is also accessible from Via Ridola.

For a great photograph, head out of town on the Taranto-Laterza road and follow signs for the *chiese rupestri*. This takes you up on the Murgia plateau to the location of the crucifixion in *The Passion of the Christ*, from where you have fantastic views of the plunging ravine and Matera.

The **Museo della Scultura Contemporanea** (Musma; www.zetema.org; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Apr-Oct, 10am-2pm Nov-Mar) is a fabulous new contemporary sculpture museum, housed in Palazzo Pomarici, known as the Palace of 100 Rooms. Exhibits are artfully displayed in atmospherically lit caves, including contemporary representations of space, thought-provoking interpretations of Adam & Eve, and a sumo-wrestling St Francis. Upstairs – in grand upper rooms adorned with 17th-century frescoes – the collection tells the story of sculpture from 1880 to the present day, and features artists such as Lyn Chadwick and Hans Arp. You can also arrange trips (right) to a crypt-chapel 14km from here, with 9th-century frescoes, created by a community of Benedictine monks.

TOWN CENTRE

The focus of the town is Piazza Vittorio Veneto, an excellent, bustling meeting point for an evening *Passeggiata*. It's surrounded by elegant churches and richly adorned *palazzi*, with their backs to the *sassi*, an attempt by the bourgeois to block out the shameful poverty the *sassi* once represented. Further excavations here have yielded more ruins of Byzantine Matera, including a rock church, a castle, a large cistern and numerous houses. You can gaze down to the site from the piazza.

Set high up in the town, the subdued, graceful exterior of the 13th-century Puglian-Romanesque **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; closed for restoration) makes the neobaroque excess within all the more of a surprise: ornate capitals, sumptuous chapels and tons of gilding. Pediments mounted on its altars came from the

temples at Metaponto. Matera's patron saint, the Madonna della Bruna, is hidden within the older church, **Santa Maria di Costantinopoli**, which can be accessed from the cathedral if it's open. Her saint's day on 2 July is the region's most important festival.

The **Museo Nazionale Ridola** (☎ 0835 31 00 58; Via Ridola 24; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun & 2-8pm Mon) occupies the 17th-century convent of Santa Chiara. The impressive collection includes some remarkable Greek pottery, such as the *Craterea Mascheroni*, a huge urn over 1m high. A little south, on Piazzetta Pascoli, is the **Museo Nazionale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna della Basilicata** (☎ 0835 31 42 35; Palazzo Lanfranchi; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Tue-Sun). The stars of the show are Levi's paintings, including the enormous mural, *Lucania '61*, depicting peasant life in biblical Technicolour.

Tours

There are plenty of official guides for the *sassi* – try the tourist office or www.sassiweb.it. Alternatively, contact the **Cooperativa Amici del Turista** (☎ 0835 33 03 01; www.amicidelturista.it; Via Fiorentini 28-30) or Ferula Viaggi (see p715) which does a classic tour, an underground tour, tours that include tastings or cookery courses, longer trips into the gorge or Pollino, and also runs Bike Basilicata – for more information, see the boxed text (p718). The people that run Musma (see left) run tours to a spectacular crypt chapel.

A reliable English-speaking guide is **Amy Weideman** (☎ 339 282 36 18). A half-day tour for two people costs €40.

Festivals & Events

In the **Sagra della Madonna della Bruna** (2 July) the colourful Procession of Shepherds parades ornately decorated papier-mâché floats around town. The finale is the *assalto al carro*, when the crowd descends on the main cart and tears it to pieces.

Sleeping

Matera has some of Basilicata's most unusual and stylish hotels housed in the historic *sassi*. Try the website www.bbmaterra.com for information about B&Bs and other types of accommodation.

Sassi Hotel/Hostel (☎ 0835 33 10 09; www.hotelsassi.it; Via San Giovanni Vecchio 89; dm €16, s/d €60/94; ☎) In an 18th-century rambling edifice in Sasso Barisano, this has graceful rooms – some in

EXPLORING THE GORGE

Gazing out over Matera's extraordinary gorge, you may well feel the urge to strike out into it. **Ferula Viaggi** (www.materaturismo.it) operates according to the principle of 'slow travel' and offers various guided trips (two to 15 people; p715) out on the Murgia plateau, from a couple of hours' walk to week-long trips. For example, the two-day tour takes in Rock Churches park and visits fortified farms and frescoed cave chapels (€162), while a week-long trip might visit the *sassi*, the canyon and the highest summits of the Pollino (€440). The best time to walk is in spring or autumn, but light walks are possible in the heat of July and August if you start early or late. Ferula Viaggi also runs **Bike Basilicata** (www.bikebasilicata.it), which rents bikes and helmets and supplies a road book and map so you can head off on your own (per day/week €18/60); guided bike tours include a seven-night 500km odyssey across Puglia and Basilicata.

caves, some not – with views and balconies, and a simple hostel downstairs.

Lemonacelle (☎ 0835 34 40 97; www.lemonacelle.it; Via Riscatto 9-10; dm €18, d €86; 📞 📺) Book ahead for this former monastery near the cathedral. It's a youth hostel with 16-bed dorms and a hotel, with a fabulous terrace. Rooms are austere but comfortable, in the former cells.

Domus del Barisano (☎ 0835 33 54 50; www.domusdelbarisano.it; Via Lombardi 16; s/d €48/68) In Sasso Barisano, this is an elegant, soberly decorated 18th-century house. One room has three arched windows framing city views, another has a terrace, and another a small balcony; there's also a small apartment available.

Il Vicinato (☎ 0835 31 26 72; www.ilvicinato.com; Piazzetta San Pietro Caveoso 7; s/d 45/70) In Sasso Caveoso, this is decorated in clean modern lines, with views across to Idris rock and the Murgia plateau. There's a room with a balcony, and a small apartment, each with independent entrances.

Residence San Pietro Barisano (☎ /fax 0835 34 61 91; www.residencesanpietrobarisano.it; Rione San Biagio 52/56; s/d from €60/80; 📞 📺) How cool can a cave be? Five apartments set off lumpy, bumpy interiors with modern, sleek, ergonomic furnishings. Stainless-steel kitchens give a futuristic feel.

La Casa di Lucio (☎ 0835 31 27 98; www.lacasadilucio.it; Via San Pietro Caveoso 66; s/d/ste €100/125/200; 📞 📺) The seven converted caves here are decorated in sleek modern style, and open onto splendid views of the Idris rock and Murgia plateau. Some have kitchenettes.

ourpick Hotel Sant'Angelo (☎ 0835 31 40 10; www.hotelsantangelosassi.it; Piazza San Pietro Caveoso; s/d/ste €90/120/160; 📞 📺) A class act that makes sleeping in a cave a luxury you can't afford to miss. The 16 renovated dwellings are spacious, romantic and stylish with panoramic views.

Eating

Terrazza dell'Annunziata Caffè (☎ 0835 33 65 25; Piazza Vittorio Veneto; snacks €5) This is the roof terrace of the old convent Palazzo dell'Annunziata (now converted into a cinema and library). Take the lift and enjoy peace and quiet and panoramic views.

Oi Mari (☎ 0835 34 61 21; Via Fiorentini 66; pizzas/pastas from €3.50/6.50; 📞 Wed-Mon) Down the road from L'Osteria, this big convivial cavern is styled as a Neapolitan pizzeria – and has a great cheery atmosphere and excellent, substantial pizzas to match.

L'Osteria (☎ 0835 33 33 95; Via Fiorentini 58; meals €15; 📞 Thu-Tue) In Sasso Barisano, this is a no-frills *osteria* with minimal seating, a noisy TV and a limited menu of traditional dishes. Good for a quick, rustic bite but if you're after leisurely or intimate, go elsewhere.

Il Convivio (☎ 0835 31 00 55; Via Madonna delle Virtù; meals €25; 📞 Wed-Mon, in winter dinner only, by reservation) This rambling series of barrel-shaped rooms burrowed into the hillside serves up smashing local specialities. There's only one menu in the entire restaurant and service can mean that meals here take some time.

ourpick Le Botteghe (☎ 0835 34 40 72; Piazza San Pietro Barisano; meals €40; 📞 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, lunch Sun) In Sasso Barisano, this is a classy but informal restaurant in airy arched whitewashed rooms. Try the mixed antipasto and follow with delicious local specialities such as *strascinate salsiccia e funghi* (pasta with sausage and mushrooms).

Ristorante Don Matteo (☎ 0835 34 41 45; Via San Biagio 12; meals €50; 📞 lunch Wed-Mon, dinner Thu-Tue) A discreet, venerable restaurant in arched stone rooms, presided over by the charming Don Matteo himself. The service is impeccable and the poetic menu is full of delicious and refined takes on traditional ingredients.

our pick **Baccanti** (☎ 0835 33 37 04; Via Sant' Angelo; meals €50; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) As classy as a cave can be. The design is simple glamour against the low arches of the cavern; the dishes are delicate and complex, using local ingredients. This is where stars go to twinkle when in town.

There's a daily fresh-produce **market** (Via Ascanio Persio) just south of Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

Drinking

Morgan Pub (☎ 0835 31 22 33; Via Bruno Boozzi; 🍷 8.30pm-3.30am Wed-Mon) In Sasso Caveoso, Morgan is a hip, cavernous pirate-themed bar dug into the cliff, a former wine cellar that's something of a surprise on the quiet street. In summer the few outside tables get busy.

our pick **19a Buca Winery?** (☎ 0835 33 35 92; www.diciannovesimabuca.com; Via Lombardi 3; 🍷 11am-midnight Tue-Sun) The question mark says it all – 13m below Piazza Vittorio Veneto the past takes a futuristic twist. Suffering an identity crisis, this ultra-chic wine bar-restaurant-café-lounge has white space-pod chairs, a 19-hole indoor golf course surrounding an ancient cistern and an impressive wine cellar and degustation menu (meals €30).

Shibuya (☎ 0835 33 74 09; Vico Purgatorio 12; 🍷 9am-3am Tue-Sun) This cool little café and CD shop is also a bar and has regular DJs; make a beeline for the few outside tables at the top of an ancient alley.

Getting There & Away

BUS

The bus station is north of Piazza Matteotti, near the train station. **SITA** (☎ 0835 38 50 07; www.sitabus.it in Italian) goes to Taranto (€3, 1½ hours, four daily) and Metaponto (€2.70, one hour, up to five daily), and many small towns in the province. **Grassani** (☎ 0835 72 14 43) serves Potenza (€5.30, two Monday to Saturday). Buy tickets from newspaper kiosks on Piazza Matteotti.

Marozzi (☎ 06 225 21 47; www.marozzivit.it) runs daily buses to Rome (€32.50, 6½ hours). A joint SITA and Marozzi service leaves daily for Siena, Florence and Pisa, via Potenza. Advance booking is essential.

TRAIN

Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane (FAL; ☎ 0835 57 25 229; www.fal-srl.it) runs regular trains (€4, 1½ hours, at least 12 daily) and buses to Bari. For Potenza,

take a FAL bus to Ferrandina and connect with a Trenitalia train, or head to Altamura to link up with FAL's Bari-Potenza run.

POTENZA

pop 68,800 / elev 819m

Basilicata's regional capital Potenza has been ravaged by earthquakes (the last in 1980), and has some brutal housing blocks. If that wasn't enough, as the highest town in the land, it broils in summer and shivers in winter. You may find yourself here, however, as it's a major transport hub.

The centre straggles east to west across a high ridge. To the south lie the main Trenitalia and Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane train stations, connected to the centre by buses 1 or 10.

Potenza's few sights are in the old centre, at the top of the hill. To get there, take the elevators from Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II. The ecclesiastical highlight is the **cathedral**, erected in the 12th century and rebuilt in the 18th. The elegant Via Pretoria, flanked by a boutique or two, makes a pleasant traffic-free stroll, especially during the *passeggiata*.

In Central Potenza, **Al Convento** (☎ 0971 2 55 91; www.alconvento.eu; Largo San Michele Arcangelo 21; s/d from €50/80; 🍷 📺) is a great accommodation choice. It's in an early-19th-century building (funnily enough, once a convent), housing a mix of polished antiques and design classics.

Antica Osteria Marconi (☎ 0971 5 69 00; Viale Marconi 233; meals €40; 🍷 lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) is a fantastic restaurant serving traditional dishes cooked with flair and imagination. It's cosy in winter and for summer there's a terrace.

Various transport companies operate from different locations in town; the tourist office has a comprehensive list of destinations and services.

Grassani (☎ 0835 72 14 43) has buses to Matera (€5.30, one hour, two daily). **SITA** (☎ 0971 50 68 11; www.sitabus.it in Italian) has daily buses to Melfi, Venosa and Maratea. Buses leave from Via Appia 185 and also stop near the Scalo Inferiore Trenitalia train station. **Liscio** (☎ 0971 5 46 73) buses serve cities including Rome (€20, 4½ hours, one daily) and Naples (€8, two hours, three daily), via Salerno (€7, 1½ hours).

To get to Salerno in the west by car or motorcycle take the A3. Metaponto lies southeast along the SS407, the Basentana. For Matera, take the SS407 and then turn north onto the SS7 at Ferrandina.

There are regular train services from Potenza Centrale to Taranto (€8.20, two hours), Salerno (€6, two hours) and Foggia (€6, 2¼ hours). To get to Matera (€7, one hour, frequent), change to an **FAL** (☎ 0971 41 15 61) bus at Ferrandina on the Metaponto line. For Bari (€8.60, three to four hours, three to four daily), use the **Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane** (☎ 0971 41 15 61) at Potenza Superiore station.

MELFI

pop 17,100

Modern Melfi is an economic centre more than a tourist haunt. However, it was a medieval mover and shaker: the first crusade was declared here by Pope Urban II in 1089, and it was a favourite residence of Frederick II, who loved to hunt the wooded slopes of Monte Vulture, shacking up in his huge castle or further south at the stark, barrack-like structure of **Castello di Lagopesole** (admission free, donations welcome; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mar-Sep, 3-5pm Oct-Feb).

Glowering on its hilltop, the eight-tower castle is home to the **Museo Nazionale del Melfese** (☎ 0972 23 87 26; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun, 2-8pm Mon), which has an excellent collection of amber, ivory and fine metal artefacts found in the area, some dating from the 8th to 3rd centuries BC. Its pride is the 2nd-century-AD Roman Sarcophago di Rapolla (Rapollo Sarcophagus).

In 1528 a sack by the French commenced Melfi's decline, and later earthquakes cemented its fall. The repeatedly earthquake-shaken **cathedral**, now mainly baroque, has retained a fine gilded wooden ceiling and a 12th-century bell tower.

Melfi is 53km north of Potenza and it can be reached from there by a daily bus and train.

VENOSA

pop 12,100

About 25km east of Melfi, autumn-coloured Venosa, with its medieval centre and flagstone lanes, used to be a thriving Roman colony, owing much of its prosperity to being a stop on the Appian Way. It was also the birthplace of the poet Horace in 65 BC. The main reason to come here is to see the remains of Basilicata's largest monastic complex.

Venosa's main square, Piazza Umberto I, is dominated by a 15th-century Aragonese castle with a small **archaeological museum** (☎ 0972 3 60

95; Piazza Umberto I; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Wed-Mon, 2-8pm Tue) that houses finds from Roman Venusia and human bone fragments dating back 300,000 years. Although not much to look at, these are Europe's oldest examples of human life.

Admission to the museum also gets you into the ruins of the **Roman settlement** (☎ 9am-1hr before dusk Wed-Mon, 2pm-1hr before dusk Tue), and the graceful later ruins of **Abbazia della Santissima Trinità** (☎ 0972 3 42 11). At the northeastern end of town, the *abbazia* (abbey) was erected above the Roman temple in around 1046 by the Benedictines, and predates the Norman invasions. Within the complex is a pair of churches, one unfinished. The earlier church contains the tomb of Robert Guiscard, Norman crusader, and his fearsome half-brother Drogo – it's said Robert arranged Drogo's death. The other, unfinished church was begun in the 11th and 12th centuries using materials from the neighbouring Roman amphitheatre. A little way south are some Jewish and Christian catacombs.

Hotel Orazio (☎ /fax 0972 3 11 35; Vittorio Emanuele II 142; s/d €36/50) is a 17th-century palace complete with antique majolica tiles and marble floors. It's overseen by a pair of grandmotherly ladies who do all they can to make your stay comfortable. The terrace has beautiful views.

Al Frantoio (☎ /fax 0972 3 69 25; Via Roma 211; meals €40; ☎ Tue-Sun) is an elegant, well-regarded restaurant occupying several graceful rooms in a building backed by olive groves; it specialises in spectacular takes on local dishes.

Venosa can be reached by a daily bus from Potenza.

LUCANIAN APENNINES

The Lucanian Apennines bite Basilicata in half like a row of jagged teeth. Sharply rearing up south of Potenza, they protect the lush Tyrrhenian Coast and leave the Ionian shores gasping in the semi-arid heat. Careering along its hair-raising roads through the broken spine of mountains can be arduous, but if you're looking for drama, the drive could be the highlight of your trip.

The Fascists exiled writer and political activist Carlo Levi to this isolated region in 1935. He lived and is buried in the tiny hilltop town of **Aliano**, where remarkably little seems to have changed since Levi wrote his dazzling *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, which laid bare the boredom, poverty and hypocrisy of village life.

The **Pinacoteca Carlo Levi** (☎ 0835 56 83 15; Piazza Garibaldi; admission €3; ☞ 10am–1pm & 4–7.30pm in summer, 10am–12.30pm & 3.30–6.30pm in winter) also houses the **Museo Storico di Carlo Levi** featuring his papers, documents and paintings. Admission to the *pinacoteca* (art gallery) includes a tour of Levi's house and entry to the museum.

More spectacular than Aliano are the two mountaintop villages of **Castelmezzano** (elevation 985m) and **Pietrapertosa** (elevation 1088m), ringed by the Lucanian dolomites. They are Basilicata's highest villages, and are often swathed in cloud, making you wonder why anyone would build here, in territory best suited to goats. Castelmezzano is surely one of Italy's most dramatic villages; the houses huddle along an impossibly narrow ledge that falls away in gorges to the Caperrino river. Pietrapertosa is even more amazing: the Saracen fortress at its pinnacle is difficult to spot, as it is carved out of the mountain.

You can spend an eerie night in Pietrapertosa in the simple *pensione* **Albergo Il Frantoio** (☎ 0971 98 31 90; albfrantoio@tiscalinet.it; Via M Torraca 15/17; s/d €26/38, d with full board €46). Don't miss the high-up, authentic Lucano restaurant **Al Becco della Civetta** (☎ 0971 98 62 49; Vicolo I Maglietta 7; meals €25; ☞ Wed–Mon; ☞) in Castelmezzano, which also offers traditionally furnished (lots of dark wood), simple whitewashed rooms (single/double €50/75) with fabulous views.

Aliano is accessible by SITA bus (p719) from Matera, with a change in Pisticci Scalo. You'll need your own vehicle to visit Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa.

IONIAN COAST

In stark contrast to the dramatic Tyrrhenian coast, the Ionian coast is a listless, flat affair dotted with large tourist resorts. However, the Greek ruins at Metaponto and Policoro, with their accompanying museums, bring alive the enormous influence of Magna Graecia in southern Italy.

Metaponto

Metaponto's Greek ruins are impressive in that this is the only site where archaeologists have managed to map the entire ancient urban plan. Settled by Greeks in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, Metapontum was probably an outpost of Sibari (in Calabria) and acted as a buffer between there and Taranto. Its most famous resident was Pythagoras, who founded a school here after being banished

from Croton (also Calabria) in the 6th century BC.

From the train station, go straight ahead for 500m to the roundabout. About 1.5km to your right (east) is the **Parco Archeologico** (admission free) and to your left, is the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (☎ 0835 74 53 27; Via Aristeia 21; admission €2.50; ☞ 9am–8pm Tue–Sun, 2–8pm Mon). In the park you can see what remains of a **Greek theatre** and the Doric **Tempio di Apollo Licio**, but the real draw is the museum, with artefacts from Metapontum and other sites.

After Pythagoras died, his house and school were incorporated into the Temple of Hera. The remains of the temple – 15 columns and sections of pavement – are Metaponto's most impressive sight. They're known as the **Tavole Palatine** (Palatine Tables), since knights, or paladins, are said to have gathered here before heading to the Crusades. It's a little way north, just off the highway – to find it follow the sliproad for Taranto onto the SS106.

You're better off staying in nearby Matera or Bernalda (below) when Senor Coppola's boutique hotel opens.

SITA (☎ 0835 38 50 07; www.sitabus.it in Italian) buses run from Matera (€2.70, one hour, five daily). The town is on the Taranto–Reggio line, and trains connect with Potenza, Salerno and occasionally Naples.

Bernalda

pop 12,100

Only 15km from the sea, hilltop Bernalda clings above the Basento valley. Its historic centre dates from the 15th century, with a two-tower castle opposite the 16th-century, Byzantine-domed San Bernardino church. Modern times have seen its development sprawl towards the coast. In May and August, a costumed procession of knights carries the statue of San Bernardino around town. Francis Ford Coppola is this town's favourite son – his grandparents are from here – and he recreated the town's festival in *Godfather III*. Coppola is converting the 19th-century Palazzo Margherita into a glamorous 12-room boutique hotel.

SITA buses run between Bernalda and Matera (p719).

Policoro

pop 15,400

If you get as far as Metaponto, consider continuing about 21km southwest to Policoro,

originally the Greek settlement of Erakleia. It's worth visiting for the wonderful **Museo della Siritide** (☎ 0835 97 21 54; Via Colombo 8; admission €2.50; 🕒 9am-8pm Wed-Mon, 2-8pm Tue), where you can work your way from 7000 BC through Lucanian ornaments to Greek mirrors, then to the spears and javelins of the Romans who put paid to them all.

SITA buses run here from Metaponto (p721).

CALABRIA

Tell a non-Calabrese Italian that you're going to Calabria, and you will probably elicit some surprise, inevitably followed by stories of the 'ndrangheta – the Calabrian Mafia – notorious for smuggling and kidnapping wealthy northerners and keeping them hidden in the mountains.

But Calabria contains startling natural beauty, and spectacular towns that seem to grow out of the craggy mountaintops. It has three national parks: the Pollino in the north, the Sila in the centre and the Aspromonte in the south. It's around 90% hills, but skirted by some of Italy's finest coast, 780km of it (ignore the bits devoured by unappealing holiday camps). Bergamot grows here, and it's the only place in the world where the plants are of sufficient quality to produce the essential oil used in many perfumes and to flavour Earl Grey tea. As in Puglia, there are hundreds of music and food festivals here year-round, reaching a fever pitch in July and August.

Admittedly, you sometimes feel as if you have stepped into a 1970s postcard, as its towns, destroyed by repeated earthquakes, are often surrounded by brutal breeze-block suburbs. The region has suffered from the unhealthy miscegenation between European and government subsidies (aimed to develop the south) and dark Mafia opportunism. Half-finished houses often mask well-furnished flats where families live happily, untroubled by invasive house taxes.

This is where to head for an adventure into the unknown.

History

Traces of Neanderthal, Palaeolithic and Neolithic life have been found in Calabria, but the region only became internationally important with the arrival of the Greeks in the

8th century BC. They founded a colony at what is now Reggio di Calabria. Remnants of this colonisation, which spread along the Ionian coast with Sibari and Crotona as the star settlements, are still visible. However, the fun didn't last for the Greeks, and in 202 BC the cities of Magna Graecia all came under Roman control. Destroying the countryside's handsome forests, the Romans did irreparable geological damage. Navigable rivers became fearsome *fiumare* (torrents) dwindling to wide, dry, drought-stricken riverbeds in high summer.

Calabria's fortified hilltop communities weathered successive invasions by the Normans, Swabians, Aragonese and Bourbons, and remained largely undeveloped. Earthquakes were another hazard; the biggest, in 1783, killed 50,000 people.

Although the 18th-century Napoleonic incursion and the arrival of Garibaldi and Italian unification inspired hope for change, Calabria remained a disappointed, feudal region and, like the rest of the south, was wracked by malaria.

A byproducts of this tragic history was the growth of banditry and organised crime. Calabria's Mafia, known as the 'ndrangheta (from the Greek for heroism/virtue), inspires fear in the local community, but tourists are rarely the target of its aggression. For many, the only answer has been to get out and, for at least a century, Calabria has seen its young people emigrate in search of work.

Getting There & Around

Lamezia Terme airport (Sant'Eufemia Lamezia, SUF; ☎ 0968 41 43 33; www.sacal.it), 63km south of Cosenza and 36km west of Catanzaro, at the junction of the A3 and SS280 motorways, links the region with major Italian cities and is also a destination for charters from northern Europe.

Public transport is not always fast or easy. For remoter places you'll need a car.

PARCO NAZIONALE DEL POLLINO

You enter Calabria through the natural fortress of Italy's largest national park, which straddles the border with Basilicata. On Calabria's side are the peak of Monti di Orsomarso and the spectacular canyon of the Gole del Raganello. For more information see the official website www.guidapollino.it, and for info on the Basilicata part of the park, see p714.

You can order detailed maps online from <http://ecommerce.escursionista.it>, including *Orsomarso-Pollino* 1:50.000 (€6.20) and *Parco Nazionale del Pollino* 1:55.000 (€6).

One of the most beautiful experiences in the Calabrian Pollino is to go white-water rafting down the spectacular Lao river. You can arrange rafting, as well as canoeing, canyoning, trekking and mountain biking at **Centro Lao Action Raft** (☎ 0985 2 14 76; www.laorafit.it; Via Lauro 10/12) in Scalea and **Aventure Lao** (☎ 0985 8 33 54; www.raftinglao.com; Calle de Miralonga) near Papisidero.

Civita, like many of the villages in the Pollino, was founded by Albanian refugees (in 1746), and its tiny **Museo Etnico Arbëreshe** (☎ 0981 7 31 50; Piazza Municipio 9; ☎ 5-8pm) is stuffed with interesting photos and artisanal work, while the houses in the village are characterised by decorated chimneys. Other towns worth visiting are **Castrovillari**, with its well-preserved 15th-century Aragonese castle, and **Morano Calabro** – look up the beautiful MC Escher woodcut of this town. Naturalists should also check out wildlife museum **Centro Il Nibbio** (☎ 0981 3 07 45; Vico Il Annunziata 11; admission €3; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun) in Morano, which explains the Pollino ecosystem.

In Castrovillari, **Locanda di Alia** (☎ 0981 4 63 70; www.alia.it; Via Jetticelle 55; s/d €90/120; P ☎) offers bungalow-style accommodation in a lush green garden. Inside, rooms feature wall murals, quirky light fittings and leather sofas. It's famous for its **restaurant** (meals €60-70; ☎ Mon-Sat Jun-Apr), where you can sample delectable local recipes featuring peppers, pork, figs, anise and honey.

Agriturismo Colloredo (☎ 347 323 69 14; fax 0981 3 12 55; www.colloredo.it; Fratelli Coscia; s/d €32/65), near Morano Calabro, is in a remote rural setting, gorgeous amid rolling hills. Rooms are comfortable, old-fashioned country-style with polished wood and flagstone floors. Activities include riding, walking, fishing and rafting.

Public transport in this part of the park is scarce, so a car is a must.

NORTHERN TYRRHENIAN COAST

The good, the bad and the ugly line the region's western seashore.

The Autostrada del Sole (A3) is one of Italy's great coastal drives. It twists and turns through mountains, past huge swathes of dark-green forest and flashes of cerulean-blue sea. But the Italian penchant for cheap sum-

mer resorts has taken its toll here, and certain stretches are despoiled with shoddy hotels and awful stacks of flats.

In the low season, most places close. In summer many hotels are full, but you should have an easier time with the camping sites.

For information about the southern section of this coast, see p734.

Praia a Mare

pop 6400

Praia a Mare lies just short of Basilicata, the start of a stretch of wide, pebbly beach that continues south for about 30km to Diamante and Cirella. This flat, leafy grid of a town sits on a wide pale-grey beach, looking out to an intriguing rocky chunk off the coast: the Isola di Dino.

Just off the seafront is the **tourist office** (☎ 0985 7 25 85; Via Amerigo Vespucci 6; ☎ 8am-1pm) with information on the **Isola di Dino**, famed for its sea caves. To visit the caves expect to pay around €5 for a guided tour from the old boys who operate off the beach. Alternatively, ask at the tourist office.

Autolinee Preite (☎ 0984 41 30 01) operates buses to Cosenza (two hours, seven daily). **SITA** (☎ 0971 50 68 11; www.sitabus.it in Italian) goes north to Maratea and Potenza. Regular trains also pass through for Paola and Reggio di Calabria.

Diamante

pop 5400

This small seaside town, with its long promenade, is central to Calabria's famous *peperoncino* – the conversation-stalling spice that so characterises its cuisine. In early September a hugely popular **chilli-eating competition** takes place. Diamante is also famed for the bright murals that adorn the old town's inner streets.

Autolinee Preite (☎ 0984 41 30 01) buses between Cosenza and Praia a Mare (seven daily) stop at Diamante.

Aieta & Tortora

Precariously perched, otherworldly **Aieta** and **Tortora** must have been difficult to reach pre-asphalt. **Rocco** (☎ 0985 76 53 12) buses serve both villages, 6km and 12km from Praia respectively. Aieta is higher than Tortora and the journey constitutes much of the reward. When you arrive, walk up to the 16th-century **Palazzo Spinello** at the end of the road and take a look into the ravine behind it – it's a great view.

Paola

pop 17,100

Paola is worth a stop to see its holy shrine. The large pilgrimage complex is above a sprawling small town where the dress of choice is a tracksuit and the main activity is hanging about on street corners. The 80km of coast south from here to Pizzo is mostly overdeveloped and ugly. Paola is the main train hub for Cosenza, about 25km inland.

Watched over by a crumbling castle, the **Santuario di San Francesco di Paola** (☎ 0982 58 25 18; admission free; ☞ 6am-1pm & 2-6pm) is a curious, empty cave with tremendous significance to the devout. The saint lived and died in Paola in the 15th century, and the sanctuary that he and his followers carved out of the bare rock has attracted pilgrims for centuries. The cloister is surrounded by naive wall paintings depicting the saint's truly incredible miracles. The original church contains an ornate reliquary of the saint. Also within the complex is a modern basilica, built to mark the second millennium. Black-clad monks hurry about.

There are several hotels near the station but you'll be better off staying in towns further north along the coast.

COSENZA

pop 70,700 / elev 238m

Cosenza has an amazing surprise clasped to its chest. Struggle through its urban outskirts and tangle of flyovers to find the medieval core, a higgledy-piggledy pile of buildings rising above the confluence of the Crati and Busento rivers. Explore its narrow alleys and steep stairways, and you'll find a fascinating town, pretty but not prettified, untouristed, with a touch of the Wild West about its dilapidated shopfronts.

Cosenza is home to Calabria's most important university, and its theatre hosts an excellent opera season. It's also the gateway to La Sila's mountains and is a major transport hub. There's a riverside Friday morning market.

Orientation & Information

The main drag, Corso Mazzini, runs south from Piazza Fera (near the bus station) and intersects Viale Trieste before meeting Piazza dei Bruzi. Head further south and cross the Busento river to reach the old town. Try the official website, www.aptcosenza.it, for information.

Sights

There's not much specific to see here, but the medieval centre is charming. Head along elegant, dilapidated Corso Telesio to the 12th-century **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☞ hours vary), rebuilt in restrained baroque style in the 18th century. In a chapel off the north aisle is a copy of an exquisite 13th-century Byzantine Madonna.

From the cathedral, you can walk up Via del Seggio through a little medieval quarter before turning right to reach the 13th-century **Convento di San Francesco d'Assisi**. Otherwise head along the *corso* to Piazza XV Marzo, an appealing square fronted by the Palazzo del Governo and the handsome neoclassical **Teatro Rendano**.

South of the piazza stretches shady **Villa Vecchia**, a huge, welcome oasis.

From Piazza XV Marzo, follow Via Paradiso, then Via Antonio Siniscalchi for the route to the down-at-heel Norman **castle** (Piazza Federico II; admission free; ☞ 8am-8pm), left in disarray by several earthquakes. It's empty inside, but the view merits the steep ascent.

Sleeping

Cosenza isn't geared for tourism, but has a couple of splendid budget options.

our pick Ostello Re Alarico (☎ 0984 79 25 70; www.ostellorealarico.com; Vico Il Giuseppe Marini Serra 10; dm €16, s/d €30/50) A fabulous youth hostel in a beautiful old house, decorated with a lovely mix of antiques and new paintings. Some rooms have brilliant views over the old city. There's a fantastic lounge with an open fire and a self-catering kitchen.

Confluenze B&B (☎ 0984 7 64 88; www.confluenze.org; Vico IV Santa Lucia 48; s €25-35, d €50-70) In the historic centre, this small, popular B&B on two upper floors is tucked away behind Piazza dei Valdesi, and has cosy, plain, wood-ceilinged rooms in an old building, as well as a lounge and kitchen. Only one room is en suite.

Hotel Excelsior (☎/fax 0984 7 43 83; Piazza Matteotti 14; s/d €40/60; ☐) The old polished lobby of this once-grand station hotel retains the dimensions of its more illustrious past. Rooms are large, practical and good value.

Eating

Gran Caffè Renzelli (☎ 0984 2 68 14; Corso Telesio 46) This venerable café has been run by the same family since 1803, when the founder arrived from Naples and began baking gooey cakes

and desserts. Sink your teeth into the *torroncino torrefacto* – a confection of sugar, spices and hazelnuts – in elegant 19th-century surroundings.

A Giulia (Via Galeazzo di Tapzia; meals €20) A tiny local restaurant with exposed stone walls, on a street just across the bridge, this is friendly and has daily pasta dishes and an antipasti buffet, and carafes of local wine.

ourpick **Ristorante Calabria Bella** (☎ 0984 79 35 31; Piazza del Duomo; meals €25; 🍷 noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight) One of the best choices in the old town, smack bang next to the cathedral and busy with locals tucking into Calabrian cuisine, such as *cavatelli con fagioli e cozze* (pasta with beans and mussels), in a series of wood-beamed rooms.

Per... Baccho!! (☎ 0984 795569; Piazza dei Valdesi; meals €25) A splendid, upmarket but informal restaurant with windows onto the square. Inside are exposed walls, vines and heavy beams. Bacchus would be pleased, as there is a great choice of wines to accompany the well-executed local dishes.

L'Arco Vecchio (☎ 0984 7 25 64; Piazza Archi di Ciccio 21; meals €25; 🍷 Wed-Mon) This family concern is deep in the old town in a 16th-century house. It has attractive low-ceilinged rooms, white tablecloths, lace, paintings and a polished baby grand, and serves tasty, traditional dishes.

Getting There & Around

The main bus station is northeast of Piazza Fera. Services leave for Catanzaro (€4.30, 1½ hours, eight daily), Paola (€2.70, 40 minutes, 10 daily) and towns throughout La Sila. **Autolinee Preite** (☎ 0984 41 30 01) has buses heading daily along the north Tyrrhenian coast, and **Autolinee Romano** (☎ 0962 2 17 09) serves Crotona, as well as Rome and Milan.

Cosenza is off the A3 autostrada. The SS107 connects the city with Crotona and the Ionian coast, across La Sila.

Stazione Nuova (☎ 0984 2 70 59) is about 2km northeast of the centre. Regular trains go to Reggio di Calabria (1st/2nd class €17.40/11.60, three hours) and Rome (€50/37, 5½ hours), both usually with a change at Paola, and Naples (€36/25, 3½ to four hours), as well as most destinations around the Calabrian coast.

Don't miss the spectacularly scenic **Ferrovie della Calabria** (www.ferroviedellacalabria.it) line, which has its terminal beside the old train station. Its little trains run through La Sila and serve

small towns around Cosenza (note trains only run between 7am and 7pm).

Amaco (☎ 0984 30 80 11) bus 27 links the centre and Stazione Nuova, the main train station.

LA SILA

La Sila is a big landscape, where wooded hills create endless rolling views. It's dotted with small villages and cut through with looping roads that make driving on them a test of your digestion.

It's divided into three areas: the Sila Grande, with the highest mountains; the strongly Albanian Sila Greca (to the north); and the Sila Piccola (near Catanzaro), with vast forested hills. The three areas cover 130 sq km.

Its highest peaks, covered with tall Corsican pines, reach 2000m, high enough for thick snow in winter. This makes it a popular skiing destination. In summer the climate is coolly alpine with carpets of spring wildflowers and mushroom-hunting in autumn. At its peak is the Bosco di Gallopani (Forest of Gallopani), part of the **Parco Nazionale della Calabria**. There are several beautiful lakes, the largest of which is Lago di Cecita o Mucone near Camigliatello.

Good-quality information in English is scarce. You can try the **Calabrian National Park office** (☎ 0984 57 97 57) or the **tourist office** (☎ 0984 57 80 91) in Camigliatello Silano. A useful internet resource is www.portalesila.it. The people who run B&B Calabria (p728) are extremely knowledgeable and helpful.

For maps, try <http://ecommerce.escursionista.it/>, where you can buy maps of Sila Grande 1:50,000 (€6.20) and Sila Piccola (€9.30). *Carte Stradali Turistiche La Sila* 1:100,000 is available at local petrol stations, or online at www.globalmap.it (€7).

You can take fantastic trekking trips with **Valli Cupe** (☎ 333 698 88 35/864 36 01; www.vallicupe.it) – on foot or via donkey or jeep – in the area around Sersale (in the southeast), where there are myriad waterfalls and the dramatic Canyon Valli Cupe. Trips cost only €7 per person per day. Specialising in botany, the guides (who speak Italian and French) also visit remote monasteries and churches. Stay in their rustic accommodation in the town (see p728).

During August, **Sila in Festa** takes place, featuring traditional music. Autumn is mushroom season, when you'll be able to frequent fungi festivals and pile into porcini pasta.

BUILDING UP CALABRIA

Raffaele Ripoli is an architect who is trying to inject some vision into the Calabrese construction scene. He also runs B&B Calabria (below) in La Sila.

Tell us about Calabria's contemporary architecture.

Significant works include Fascist-era works in Cosenza and Reggio, the Cosenza university campus and the recently renovated seafront at Reggio. Some regeneration has begun in Cosenza, featuring interesting contemporary architecture. Some projects have been chosen after a process of public competition (a method that in Italy is rarely used, and when it is, tends to be used badly).

The peripheries of the cities and small towns are most problematic. With no or bad planning, the result has been a lack of continuity between historic and new buildings. This is a problem in Italy. Since the 1950s the landscape has been slowly transformed: the first urban expansions began in the cities, where apartment blocks were built following the abandonment of the historic centres and consequent demand for housing.

How do you find being an architect in Calabria?

The architect is now more recognized, even if a lack of information about this work is a constant challenge. The architect's role is often substituted by engineers or people not fully qualified as architects – this is a particularly common problem in the south.

What are your favourite architectural places here?

Turre, the rural houses scattered on former agricultural pastures, because they are in perfect harmony with the land. I like the Franciscan convent and the Basilian monastery for their architectural sobriety. My preferred city is Cosenza because the historic centre has been preserved (even if it needs restoration), my favourite hinterland town is Gerace and favourite seaside town is Tropea. Other unspoilt towns that deserve mention are Morano, Rocca Imperiale, Altomonte, Diamante, Amantea, Fiumefreddo Bruzio, Oriolo, Rossano, Rende, Santa Severina, Scilla, Stilo and Pentadattilo.

You often see unfinished buildings in Calabria. Why?

These demonstrate that some people in the south are living in difficulty. Motives are diverse. One of many is that people are unable to plan. They want a big house but don't realise the full cost. Parents build big houses hoping that their sons will stay with them, but the sons either emigrate or decide to live in another house. Also, often the town-dwelling Calabrese prefer to buy things for inside the house rather than finish the outside.

Sila Towns

Sila's main town, **San Giovanni in Fiore** (1049m) is named after the founder of its beautiful medieval **abbey**. The town has an attractive old centre, once you've battled through the suffocating suburbs, and is famous for its Armenian-style handloomed carpets and tapestry. You can visit the studio and shop of **Domenico Caruso** (☎ 0984 99 27 24; www.scuolatappeti.it), but ring ahead.

A popular ski-resort town, with 6km of slopes, **Camigliatello Silano** (1272m) looks much better under snow. A few lifts operate on Monte Curcio, about 3km to the south. Around 5.5km of slopes and a 1500m lift can be found near **Lorica** (1370m), on gloriously pretty Lago Arvo – the best place to camp in summer.

Scigliano (620m), in Sila Piccola, is a small hilltop town and has a wonderful B&B, and

from **Sersale** (739m) further south, you can go trekking (see p727) and see the Campanero, Aquila and Inferno waterfalls.

Sleeping

It's wonderful to stay around the pretty lakes, but other places dotted in small towns are well worth the journey. Camigliatello is the winter base of choice.

Camping Lorica (☎ 0984 53 70 18; camp site per person €6) Lorica's lakeside is a particularly great place to camp. Try this place – high up and wonderful.

our pick Valli Cupe (☎ 333 698 88 35/864 36 01; www.vallicupe.it; €15 per person) Valli Cupe can arrange a stay in a charming rustic cottage in Sersale, complete with an open fireplace (good for roasting chestnuts) and kitchen.

our pick B&B Calabria (☎ 349 878 18 94; www.bedandbreakfastcalabria.it; s/d €25/50) Break through

the invisible curtain of Calabrese reserve by staying in this unique B&B. It's in Scigliano, and looks out over endless forested vistas. Raffaele and his wife Esther run the B&B with grace and efficiency. What's more, they'll give you tips on good shops, great eating places, pack you picnics, lend you their mountain bikes and regale you with hilarious stories of life in a real Italian village. Rooms have character and clean modern lines and there's a wonderful terrace.

Hotel Aquila & Edelweiss (☎ 0984 57 80 44; fax 0984 57 87 53; Viale Stazione 11; s €45-65, d €70-85) This three-star hotel is in Camigliatello. Outside suffers a bit from the stark architecture of the ski resort, but inside is wood-panelled, cosy and welcoming.

Park Hotel 108 (☎ 0521 64 81 08; www.hotelpark108.it; Via Nazionale 86, Loricca; r €90-130) On the hilly banks of Lago Arvo surrounded by dark-green pines, here the rooms are spacious and comfortable, with a lovely light from the lake. They're decorated in classic bland hotel style but it's the views that are really special.

Shopping

La Siala's forests yield wondrous wild mushrooms, both edible and poisonous. Sniff around the **Antica Salumeria Campanaro** (Piazza Misasi 5) in Camigliatello Silano; it's a temple to all things fungoid, as well as an emporium of fine meats, cheeses, pickles and wines, rivalled in richness, if not in size, by its neighbour, La Casa del Fungho.

Getting There & Away

You can reach Camigliatello Silano and San Giovanni in Fiore via regular Ferrovie della Calabria buses along the SS107, which links Cosenza and Crotona, or by the train running between Cosenza and San Giovanni in Fiore.

IONIAN COAST

With its flat coastline and wide sandy beaches, the Ionian coast has some fascinating stops from Sibari to Santa Severina. However, the coast has borne the brunt of some ugly development and is mainly a long, uninterrupted string of resorts, thronged in the summer months and shut down from October to May.

Sibari

About 4km south of the modern, fast-developing town of Sibari are the remnants

of the seat of the ancient Sybarites, those luxury-loving Greeks renowned for their wealth and love of pampering. Sybaris was destroyed by a jealous Crotona in the 6th century BC. You can visit the **ruins** (admission free; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset), though 90% remain buried. The small **Museo Archeologico della Sibartide** (admission €2; ☎ 9am-7.30pm, closed 1st & 3rd Mon of month) is 7km away (signposted off the autostrada).

The coastline from Sibari to the unappealing urban centre of Crotona is the region's least developed, partly because the beaches are not terribly good.

Santa Severina

pop 2300

Around 26km from Crotona, Santa Severina is a spectacular mountaintop town, dominated by a Norman castle, and home to a beautiful Byzantine church.

Stay at charming, rural **Agriturismo Querceto** (☎ 0962 5 14 67; www.agriturismoilquerceto.kr.it; s/d €30/50; ☎), an organic farm around 4km from the centre, which produces olive oil and jams and has double rooms or mini-apartments with kitchen.

Autolinee Romano (☎ 0962 2 17 09) runs buses to/from Crotona.

Le Castella

Le Castella is south of a rare protected area (Capo Rizzuto) along this coast, rich not only in nature but also in Greek history. For further information on the park try www.riserva.marinacaporizzuto.it.

The town is named for its impressive 16th-century Aragonese **castle** (admission €3, ☎ 9am-1pm) a vast edifice linked to the mainland by a short causeway. The philosopher Pliny said that Hannibal constructed its first tower. Evidence shows it was begun in the 4th century BC, designed to protect Crotona in the wars against Pyrrhus.

With around 15 camp sites near Isola di Capo Rizzuto to the north, this is the Ionian coast's prime camping area. Try **La Fattoria** (☎ 0962 79 11 65; Via del Faro; camp site per person €4-9, tent €2-9; ☎ Jun-Sep), 1.5km from the sea, with bungalows also available.

At **L'Aragonese** (☎ 0962 79 50 13; Via Discesa Marina; meals €25) you can eat a good meal overlooking the castle; or try **Da Annibale** (☎ 0962 79 50 04; Via Duomo 35; meals €30), a splendid fish restaurant, for fresh seafood, deliciously cooked.

Gerace

pop 2900

A spectacular medieval hill town, Gerace is worth a detour for the views alone – on one side the Ionian Sea, on the other dark, interior mountains. About 10km inland from Locri on the SS111, it has Calabria's largest Romanesque **cathedral**. Dating from 1045, later alterations have robbed it of none of its majesty.

For a taste of traditional Calabrian cooking, modest, welcoming **Ristorante a Squella** (☎ 0964 35 60 86; Viale della Resistenza 8; meals €20) makes for a great lunchtime stop – afterwards you can wander down the road and admire the views.

Further inland is **Canolo**, a small village seemingly untouched by the 20th century. Buses connect Gerace with Locri and also Canolo with Sidernia, both of which link to the main coastal railway line.

CATANZARO

pop 95,100 / elev 320m

Catanzaro can be a lively town if you don't catch it during the midafternoon snooze, but has few attractions for visitors. A mountain-top city 12km inland from the Ionian coast, it replaced Reggio as the regional capital in the 1970s. Little remains of its Byzantine and medieval past, thanks to earthquakes and WWII bombs. Although rundown, the centre's not unattractive. It's also the birthplace of artist Mimmo Rotella, who became famous in the 1950s for his film-poster collages.

Villa Trieste (☎ 7am-9pm summer, to 6pm winter) is an attractive park and contains the city's **Museo Provinciale** (☎ 0961 72 00 19; Villa Margherita; admission free; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1.30pm Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun), with various works by Calabrian artists, including Mimmo Rotella.

Caffè Imperiale (☎ 0961 74 32 31; Corso Mazzini 159; ☎ 7.30am-2am) is a *belle époque* café on Catanzaro's main thoroughfare; not much has changed here since 1892. This is a fab place for coffee or ice cream.

Hidden down a narrow sidestreet, **Da Salvatore** (☎ 0961 72 43 18; Via Salita del Rosario 28; pizzas from €3, meals €11) is an unpretentious restaurant serving excellent local dishes and pizza. Try the *salsiccia alla Palanca* (sausage with greens), named in honour of a local football hero.

Ferrovie della Calabria (☎ 0961 89 62 10; www.ferroviedellacalabria.it) buses terminate beside the Ferrovie della Calabria train station. They

serve the Ionian coast, La Sila and Cosenza (€4.20, 1¼ hours, eight daily) and Vibo Valentia (€3.40, two hours, four daily), among other provincial towns. They also run to Catanzaro Lido, where you can pick up a train for Reggio or head northeast along the Ionian coast.

From the Catanzaro city station, trains connect with Lamezia Terme, Reggio and Cosenza, as well as Naples, Rome, Milan and Turin.

ASPROMONTE

Most Italians think of the **Parco Nazionale dell'Aspromonte** (www.aspromonte.it) as a hiding place used by Calabrian kidnappers in the 1970s and '80s. It's still rumoured to contain 'ndrangheta strongholds, but as a tourist you're unlikely to encounter any murky business. The park is startlingly dramatic, rising sharply inland from Reggio. Its highest peak, **Montalto** (1955m), is dominated by a huge bronze statue of Christ and offers sweeping views across to Sicily.

Subject to frequent mudslides and carved up by torrential rivers, the mountains captivated artist Edward Lear in the 19th century and are still awesomely beautiful. Underwater rivers keep the peaks covered in coniferous forests and ablaze with flowers in spring.

Extremes of weather and geography have resulted in some extraordinary villages, such as **Pentidattilo** and **Roghudi**, clinging limpetlike to the craggy, rearing rocks and now all but deserted. It's wonderful, not-much-visited walking country and the park has several colour-coded trails.

Try <http://ecommerce.escursionista.it/> for detailed maps, such as *Carta Escursionista della Calabria - Aspromonte* 1:50,000 (€9.30).

Gambarie, Aspromonte's main town, is the easiest approach the park. The roads are good and many activities are organised from here – you can ski and it's also the place to hire a 4WD; ask around in the town.

It's also possible to approach from the south, but the roads are less good. The cooperative **Naturaliter** (www.naturaliterweb.it), based in **Condofuri**, is an excellent source of information, and can help arrange walking and donkey treks and place you in B&Bs throughout the region. Otherwise stay at **Azienda Agrituristica Il Bergamotto** (☎ 0965 72 72 13; Condofuri Marina; s/d with half board €35/64) where Ugo Sergi can also arrange excursions. The rooms are simple and the food delicious.

Reggio-based **Misafumera** (☎ 0965 67 70 21; www.misafumera.it; Via Nazionale 306d) runs week-long trekking excursions (€480; April to November) or a four-day trek in the snowy season (€280; December to April).

To reach Gambarie, take ATAM city bus 127 from Reggio di Calabria (€2, 1½ hours, three daily). Most of the roads inland from Reggio eventually hit the SS183 road that runs north to the town.

REGGIO DI CALABRIA

pop 183,000

Reggio is the main launching point for ferries to Sicily and home to the spectacular Bronzi di Riace. Otherwise it has the slightly dissolute feel shared by most ports and a long, impressive seafront promenade – packed during the evening *passaggiata*. The orange lights of Sicily sparkle temptingly across the Straits of Messina, almost within reach.

Beyond the seafront a grid of streets gives way to urban sprawl. Ravaged by earthquakes, the most recent in 1908, this once-proud ancient Greek city has plenty of other woes. As a port and the largest town close to the 'ndrangheta strongholds of Aspromonte, organised crime is a major issue.

There are plenty of festivals in Reggio – early August sees the **Festival dello Stretto** (www.festivaldellostretto.it), featuring the traditional music of the south.

Orientation

Stazione Centrale, the main train station, is at the town's southern edge on Piazza Garibaldi, where most buses also terminate. Walk north-east along Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi, the city's main street, for the tourist office, shopping and other services. The *corso* has long been a de facto pedestrian zone during the ritual *passaggiata*.

Information

Hospital (☎ 0965 39 71 11; Via Melacrino)

Police station (☎ 0965 41 11 11; Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi 442)

Post office (Via Miraglia 14)

Tourist office (Via Roma 3 ☎ 0965 225 30 31

☎ 7.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri); airport (☎ 0965 64 32 91); Stazione Centrale (☎ 0965 2 71 20)

Sights

A Magna Graecia munificence fills the excellent **Museo Nazionale** (☎ 0965 81 22 55; Piazza de Nava;

adult/child €6/3; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Tue-Sun). The museum's pride, displayed in an earthquake-proof basement, are the world's finest examples of ancient Greek sculpture: the **Bronzi di Riace**, two exquisite bronze statues discovered on the seabed near Riace in 1972. Larger than life, they depict the Greek obsession with the body beautiful, inscrutable, determined and fierce, their perfect form more godlike than human. No-one knows who they are – whether man or god – and even their provenance is a mystery. They date from around 450 BC, and it's believed they're the work of two artists.

Aside from the bronzes, there are other magnificent ancient exhibits. Look for the 5th-century-BC bronze *Philosopher's Head*, the oldest known Greek portrait, and the *Head of Basel* – another 5th-century-BC bust. There's also one of the Mezzogiorno's best collections of art, primarily by southern Italian artists. It's worth investing in an audioguide.

Sleeping

Finding a room should be easy, even in summer, since most visitors pass straight through en route to Sicily.

Hotel Diana (☎ 0965 89 15 22; fax 0965 2 40 61; Via Vitrioli 12; s/d €27.50/55) About 1km from the station, but not far from the seafront, large and a bit rundown, this is an OK option if you're watching your Euros.

Hotel Lungomare (☎ 0965 2 04 86; www.hotellungomare.rc.it; Viale Genoese Zerbi 13; s/d €80/110; P ♿) This neat, wedding-cake exterior is a welcome sight amid Reggio's new buildings. Rooms are plain and nothing special, but staff are friendly and courteous. Ask for a room with a sea view.

Eating

For Reggio's best ice cream, you'll have to decide between **Antica Gelateria Malavenda** (☎ 0965 89 14 49; cnr Via Romeo & Via Giovanni Amendola; ☎ 6am-midnight Sun-Fri, to 1am Sat), and **Césare** (Piazza Indipendenza; ☎ 8am-1am), a popular green kiosk at the end of the *lungomare* (seafront) – Berlusconi's choice when he popped by in March 2007.

Braceria (☎ 0965 2 93 61; Via Demetrio Tripepi 81-83; meals €20) A bit too rustic to be true – think terracotta mugs instead of glasses – but the food is the real thing. Specialising in grilled meat and fish, it also serves an amazingly good *sapori della Calabria* antipasto comprising brilliant ricotta and chilli-hot bruschetta.

Le Rose al Bicchiere (☎ 0965 2 29 56; Via Demetrio Tripepi 118; meals €30; ☎ Mon-Fri lunch, Mon-Sat dinner

REGGIO DI CALABRIA

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

INFORMATION	
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Post Office.....	3 B4
Tourist Office.....	4 A5
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES	
Museo Nazionale.....	6 C3
SLEEPING	
Hotel Diana.....	7 B4
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EATING	
Antica Gelateria Malavenda.....	9 C3
Baylik.....	10 D1
Braceria.....	11 C4
Cesàre.....	12 C3
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TRANSPORT	
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Hydrofoil & Ferry Terminal.....	17 C2

To Airport (4km)
SS106 South (5.5km)

To Airport (5km)



Oct-Jun) A wine bar with some delicious fresh local and organic produce on offer to accompany wines so inviting you'll have to pour yourself onto the ferry. The local cheeses and desserts are particularly good.

Baylik (☎ 0965 4 86 24; Vico Leone 3; meals €30; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Fri-Wed) Worth the slight trek, Baylik is friendly, and the calamari is so fresh your knife glides through it like butter; there's a dazzling array of fish dishes.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Reggio's **airport** (Aeroporto Civile Minniti, REG; ☎ 0965 64 05 17) is at Ravagnese, about 5km south. Alitalia and/or Air One fly to and from Rome, Milan and Bergamo. Air Malta flies to Barcelona, Rome and Malta.

BOAT

Boats for Messina (Sicily) leave from the port (just north of Stazione Lido). In high season there are up to 20 hydrofoils daily; in low season there are as few as two. Some boats continue to the Aeolian Islands.

Services are run by various companies including **Meridiano** (☎ 0965 81 04 14; www.meridiano.it) and **Ustica** (☎ 0965 29568; www.usticalines.it). Prices for cars are €10 one way (passengers don't pay extra), and for foot passengers €1.50 to €2.80.

Ferries for cars and foot passengers cross to Messina around the clock from Villa San Giovanni, 14km further north along the rail line. Both **Caronte** (☎ 800 627 414; www.carontetour.it) and **Tourist Shipping** (☎ 0965 75 14 13) run regular year-round ferries. Foot passengers pay €1. A medium-sized car costs €23 return, or €40 for a 60-day return (passengers don't pay extra). Motorcycles cost €6/10 one way/return, or €12 for a 60-day return. The crossing takes 25 minutes and departs every 20 minutes.

BUS

Most buses terminate at Piazza Garibaldi, in front of the Stazione Centrale. Several different companies operate to towns in Calabria and beyond. **ATAM** (☎ 800 43 33 10; www.atam-rc.it) serves the Aspromonte Massif, with bus 127 to Gambarie (€2, 1½ hours, five daily). **Costaviola** (☎ 0965 75 15 86; www.costaviola.bus.it) serves Scilla (€2, 45 minutes, six daily). **Liroso** (☎ 0966 5 79 01) serves Rome (€50, eight hours, three daily).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The A3 ends at Reggio. If you are continuing south, the SS106 hugs the coast round the 'toe', then heads north along the Ionian Sea. Reggio has a weirdly complex parking system – buy a parking permit (€0.50 per hour) from newspaper kiosks or from a parking representative, if you can find one.

TRAIN

Trains stop at **Stazione Centrale** (☎ 0965 89 20 21) and less frequently at Stazione Lido, near the museum. Reggio is the terminus for trains to Milan (1st/2nd €73/67, 16½ to 17½ hours), Rome (€73/50, 6½ to eight hours) and Naples (€57/39, 4½ to 5½ hours). There are also services for Turin, Florence and Venice but for a wider choice change at Paola (€28/21, two hours, five daily). Regional services run along the coast to Scilla and Tropea (more convenient than the bus), and also to Catanzaro and less frequently to Cosenza and Bari.

Getting Around

Orange local buses run by **ATAM** (☎ 800 43 33 10; www.atam-rc.it) cover most of the city. For the port, take bus 13 or 125 from Piazza Garibaldi outside Stazione Centrale. The Porto-Aeroporto bus (125) runs from the port via Piazza Garibaldi to the airport and vice versa (25 minutes, hourly). Buy your ticket at ATAM offices, tobacconists or newsstands.

DON'T TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

After about 30 years of discussion, the plans for a bridge from the Italian mainland to Sicily were finally knocked back in autumn 2006 when MPs voted to cancel the project. The €6 billion project – a favourite of former prime minister Berlusconi – was intended to build the world's longest suspension bridge between Reggio and Messina: with a total length of 3.7km it would require two 382m towers to support the 3300m span. But the government felt that there were other more pressing priorities to address for impoverished Sicily, such as its infrastructure. Other concerns were that the vast project would inevitably enrich southern Italy's organised crime networks and that the bridge would not withstand an earthquake, a likely event in this earthquake-prone zone.

SOUTHERN TYRRHENIAN COAST

North of Reggio, along the coast-hugging Autostrada del Sole (A3), the scenery rocks and rolls to become increasingly beautiful and dramatic, if you ignore the shoddy holiday camps and unattractive developments that sometimes scar the land. Like the northern part of the coast (see p724) it's mostly closed in winter, and packed in summer.

Scilla

pop 5200

Higgledy-piggledy Scilla piles up on ochre-and-green cliffs, above a small broad sandy beach and bright bobbing boats, all overlooked by a castle on a sheer outcrop. Lively in summer and serene in the low season, the town is split in two by the tiny port – the fishing district of Scilla Chianalea, to the north, harbours small hotels and restaurants off narrow lanes, lapped by the sea.

Scilla's highpoint is a rock at the northern end, said to be the lair of Scylla, the mythical six-headed sea monster who drowned sailors as they tried to navigate the Strait of Messina. Swimming and fishing off the town's beach is today somewhat safer.

Albergo le Sirene (☎ 0965 75 40 19; Via Nazionale 55; s €30-40, d €50-70; 🍷) is a medium-sized, friendly and homely *pensione* run by an elderly lady, which offers plain rooms: ask for one with a sea view to make your stay special. Sea-facing rooms open onto a large terrace, ideal for observing the *passaggiata* all along the promenade.

Le Piccole Grotte (☎ 338 209 67 27; Via Grotte 10; d €90-120) is at the other end of Scilla, in the quaint Chianalea district. It's in a 19th-century fishermen's house. The best rooms have small, sea-facing balconies, and all are plain and smart with kitchenettes.

Good seafront restaurants include **Glauco** (☎ 0965 75 40 26; Via Annunziata; meals €40; 🍷 Thu-Tue Mar-Sep), in the Chianalea district, serving tasty seafood in a house with its feet in the sea. You can sink a beer at the **Dali City Pub** (Via Porto), on the beach in Scilla town, which has a Beatles tribute corner and has been going since 1972.

Capo Vaticano

There are spectacular views from this rocky cape, with its beaches, ravines and limestone sea cliffs. Bird-watchers will have a ball. Around 7km from Tropea, Capo Vaticano

has a lighthouse, built in 1885, which is close to a short footpath from where you can see as far as the Aeolian Islands. Capo Vaticano beach is one of the balmiest along this coast.

Tropea

pop 6900

Tropea, a puzzle of lanes and piazzas, is famed for its captivating prettiness and dramatic position. It sits on the Promontorio di Tropea, which stretches from Nicotera in the south to Pizzo in the north. The coast alternates between dramatic cliffs and white-sand beaches, all edged by translucent sea. Unsurprisingly, zillions of Italian holidaymakers descend here in summer.

The town overlooks **Santa Maria dell'Isola**, a medieval church with a Renaissance makeover, which sits on its own island although centuries of silt have joined it to the mainland.

Despite the mooted theory that Hercules founded the town, it seems this area has been settled as far back as Neolithic times. In its time, Tropea has been occupied by the Arabs, Normans, Swabians, Anjous and Aragonese, as well as attacked by Turkish pirates. Perhaps they were after the famous local sweet red onions.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0963 6 14 75; Piazza Ercole; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) is in the old town centre.

The beautiful Norman **cathedral** (🕒 6-11.50am & 4-7pm) has two undetonated WWII bombs near the door: it's believed they didn't explode due to the protection of the town's patron saint, Our Lady of Romania.

During summer there are lots of discos and special events. Many hotels close in winter.

ourpick De Medici (☎ 0963 6 13 61; Via Dardano 5; s €30-60, d €55-110, tr €70-150, q €80-170) is in the historic centre, and is a sweet B&B in an old building, with rooms around a light, bright, central room with white sofas, a wooden dining table and an exposed stone wall. The nicely decorated rooms are plain but stylish; the quad is a duplex.

ourpick Residence il Barone (☎ 0963 607181; www.bedebreakfast-residenza-il-barone.it; s €56-126, d €80-200; 🍷 🍷), a graceful *palazzo*, has six suites decorated in masculine neutrals and tobacco-browns, with dramatic modern paintings by the owner's brother adding pizzazz to the walls. The suites are superbly appointed, and you can breakfast on the small roof terrace with views over the old city and out to sea.

Hidden in the old town, **Vecchia Forno** (Via Cairano; pizzas €2.50-6; ☎ dinner Apr-Nov) serves fabulous pizza, either inside the great smoke-blackened beamed barn with horseshoes on the walls, or outside at tables in the narrow alley.

Also recommended is the fish restaurant **Osteria del Pescatore** (☎ 0963 60 30 18; Via del Monte 7; meals €30; ☎ 7.30pm-late), tucked away in the backstreets.

Trains run to Vibo Valentia (24 minutes), Pizzo (30 minutes), Scilla (one hour 20 minutes) and Reggio (two hours). **SAV** (☎ 0963 611 29) buses connect with other towns on the coast.

Vibo Valentia

pop 33,700

About 8km south of Pizzo, up high and slightly inland, is Vibo Valentia, a one-time Greek, then Roman, settlement, good for a brief roam if you're stuck waiting for public transport. Above the town is its **castle**, which was built by the Normans and later reinforced by both Frederick II and the Angevins. It offers sweeping panoramas and an excellent small **museum** (☎ 0963 4 33 50; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), housing well-displayed artefacts from Hipponion – the original Greek settlement – including 6th-century BC bronze helmets.

La Locanda Daffinà (☎ 0963 472669; www.lalocandadaffina.it; Corso Umberto I 160; s/d/ste €75/100/150), near the cathedral, is a 19th-century palace with stately antique-furnished rooms. The restaurant (open Monday to Saturday, meals €50), in the graceful loggia, is the place to go if you deserve a long lunch.

A coastal railway runs around the promontory from Rosarno and Nicotera to Vibo Valentia Marina and Pizzo. **SAV** (☎ 0963 6 11 29) buses also connect most resorts with Tropea and Pizzo.

Pizzo

pop 8900

Stacked high up on a sea cliff, pretty little Pizzo is the place to go for *tartufo*, a death-by-chocolate ice-cream ball, and to see an extraordinary rock-carved grotto church. It's a popular tourist stop. Piazza della Repubblica is the epicentre, set high above the sea with great views. Settle here at one of the many gelateria terraces for an ice-cream fix.

A kilometre north, the **Chiesa di Piedigrotta** (admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7.30pm) is an underground cave full of carved stone statues. It was carved into the tufa rock by Neapolitan shipwreck survivors in the 17th century. Other sculptors added to it and it was eventually turned into a church. Later statues include the less-godly figures of Fidel Castro and JFK. It's a bizarre, one-of-a-kind mixture of mysticism, mystery and kitsch.

In town, the 16th-century **Chiesa Matrice di San Giorgio** (Via Marconi), with its dressed-up Madonnas, houses the tomb of Joachim Murat, brother of Napoleon and one-time king of Naples. Although he was the architect of enlightened reforms, the locals showed no great concern when Murat was imprisoned and executed here. At the neat little 15th-century **Castello Murat** (☎ 0963 53 25 23; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3pm-midnight Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Oct-May), south of Piazza della Repubblica, you can see Murat's cell. His last days and death by firing squad are graphically illustrated by waxworks.

Armonia B&B (☎ 0963 53 33 37; www.casaarmonia.com; Via Armonia 9; s without bathroom €30-45, d €40-70) is an attractive house a few streets from Piazza della Repubblica. Filled with trinkets, it's like staying in someone's house. There's a great terrace overlooking the sea. Eat at welcoming **Pizzeria Ruota** (☎ 0963 53 24 27; Piazza della Repubblica 36; pizzas €2.10-6.50; ☎ 11am-3.30pm & 7.30pm-midnight Thu-Tue), which has splendid, big pizzas.

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