



Puglia, Basilicata & Calabria

Italy's south is out on a limb; this is the heel of Italy, a hotter, edgier place than the urbane, sophisticated and, dare we suggest, mildly smug north. But the traditional north-south divide is starting to blur. Tuscany in the '80s, Umbria in the '90s...many of today's trend-spotters feel the south and, in particular, Puglia, is the new darling of travellers in the know and holiday-home Brits.

This is not yet another *dolce vita* region that can be glibly described with a few apt superlatives. There are plenty of reminders of unrelenting poverty and plenty to regret – such as the stark urban sprawl of Brindisi and the industrial development around Potenza and Taranto.

The flip side is a rich and varied portfolio of plains in the south, mountains in the north and a dramatic and varied coastline. The people are similarly diverse, although share a fierce local pride, reflecting Greek, Spanish and Turkish influences in their culture and cuisine.

Basilicata is a crush of mountains and rolling hills with a dazzling stretch of coastline. Calabria is Italy's wildest area with fine beaches, subtropical vegetation and a mountainous landscape with peaks frequently crowned by ruined castles. Puglia's charms include 800km of coastline beneath limestone cliffs, interspersed with thick forests and olive groves.

This is an area that still feels like it has secret places to explore, although you will need your own wheels (and some Italian) if you plan to seriously sidestep from the beaten track.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Dip into the Disney-style scenario of the gnome-size *trulli* dwellings in **Alberobello** (p713), Puglia
- Wonder at ornate baroque facades in **Lecce** (p721)
- Immerse yourself in nature exploring the verdant **Promontorio del Gargano** (p696)
- Discover one of Calabria's most characterful old centres in seaside **Tropea** (p754)
- Vanish into the vast hills of **La Sila** (p748) in Calabria, and the **Parco Nazionale del Pollino** in both Basilicata (p741) and Calabria (p743)
- Drive or trek into the wilds of mysterious **Aspromonte** (p750)
- Explore the otherworldly *sassi* (former cave dwellings) of **Matera** (p733) in Basilicata



■ 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; *taran-tella* (mesmerising local folk music); fields stippled with a dazzle of spring flowers; cigarette-and-people-smuggling; elderly men on benches; elderly women mopping their front step; plenty of bicycles; summer carnivals; immigrants arriving by boat; and dialects that change from town to town.

Italy's heel has the country's longest coastline. Two seas meet here: the Adriatic to the east and the Ionian to the south. It's legendary for its food, in a land where the cuisine is all-important: olive oil, grapes tomatoes, aubergines, artichokes, peppers, salami, fungi, olives and fresh seafood strain its table. 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 from emerald-green and dusky powder blue.

There are festivals here throughout the year, but fabulous events, concerts (often *taran-tella*), and *sagre* (festivals, usually involving food) take place virtually every night in July and August. Check the www.quisalento.it website for a schedule.

History

At times Puglia feels Greek – and for good reason. This tangible legacy dates from when the Greeks founded a string of settlements along the Ionian coast in the 8th century BC. A form of Greek dialect (Griko) is still spoken in some towns southeast of Lecce. Historically, their major city was Taras (Taranto), settled by Spartan exiles who

dominated until they were defeated by the Romans in 272 BC.

The long coastline made the region vulnerable to conquest. The Normans left their fine Romanesque churches, the Swabians their fortifications, and the Spanish their flamboyant baroque buildings. No one, however, knows exactly the origins of the extraordinary 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. After Mussolini's seizure of power in 1922 following WWI, the south became the frontline 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.

PROMONTORIO DEL GARGANO

The coast surrounding the promontory seems permanently bathed in a pink-hued, pearly light, providing a painterly contrast to the sea which softens from intense to powder blue as the evening draws in. It's one of Italy's most beautiful areas, encompassing white limestone cliffs, fairy-tale 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 p703) and the historic pilgrimage destination of Monte Sant'Angelo.

OUR TOP FIVE CENTRO STORICOS (HISTORIC CENTRES) IN PUGLIA

- **Locorotondo** (p714)
- **Martina Franca** (p715)
- **Ostuni** (p717)
- **Vieste** (p701)
- **Lecce** (p721)

REGIONAL ITINERARY

ITALY'S AUTHENTIC SOUTH

One Week / Vieste / Maratea

Consider a gentle start in lovely, laid-back **Vieste** (p701) with its white sandy beaches, medieval backstreets and lush back garden of the **Parco Nazionale del Gargano** (opposite). Continue to ease into the southern-Italian lifestyle with a next-day stop at **Lucera** (p705) a honey-coloured town of *palazzi* (mansions), churches, chic shops and a general air of contentment, especially evident during the evening *passeggiata* (stroll). Next day it's *trulli* (circular stone-built houses) time with a visit to one of the most unusual urban landscapes in Italy. En route dip into pretty **Polignano a Mare** (p712) with its dramatic location above the pounding surf. After a midday snack at **Boca Chica** (p713), make the short hop inland to **Alberobello** (p713), home to a dense neighbourhood of these extraordinary cone-shaped homes. Shake your head in wonder and consider an overnight *trulli* stay.

Stroll or (bike ride) around one of the most picturesque *centro storico's* in southern Italy at **Locorotondo** (p714). Hit the road and cruise on to a delightful gem of a city: **Lecce** (p721) where you can easily chalk up a full day exploring the sights, the shops and the flamboyantly fronted *palazzi* and churches, including the **Basilica di Santa Croce** (p723) cherry on the (wedding) cake.

Day five will be one to remember. Nothing can prepare you for Basilicata's **Matera** (p733) where the *sassi* (former cave dwellings) are a dramatic, albeit harrowing, reminder of the town's poverty-stricken past. After days of pasta, *fave* beans and *cornetti* (Italian croissants), it's high time you laced up those hiking boots and checked out the trails and activities on offer in the spectacular **Parco Nazionale del Pollino** (p741). Finally, wind up the trip and soothe those aching muscles with a dip in the sea at postcard-pretty **Maratea** (p740) with its surrounding seaside resorts, medieval village and cosmopolitan harbour offset by a thickly forested and mountainous interior.



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.

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, 3.45-6.30pm Mon-Wed), is in Monte Sant'Angelo, on the edge of town. 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 – thickets of tall, epic trees, interspersed with picnic spots that are bathed in dappled light. It's the last remnant of Puglia's ancient forests: Aleppo pines, oaks, yews and beech trees shade the mountainous terrain. More than 65 different types of orchid have been discovered here while the wildlife includes roe deer, wild boar, foxes, badgers and the increasingly rare wild cat. Walkers and mountain bikers will find plenty of well-marked trails within the forest's 5790 sq km.

There is a small *centro visitatori* (visitors centre) in the middle of the forest that houses a **museum and nature centre** (☎ 0884 8 80 55; [\[ecogargano.it\]\(http://ecogargano.it\); €1.60; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep\) with fossils, photographs and stuffed animals and birds. Half-day guided hikes can be organised from around €10 per person and walking maps are available \(€2.50\).](http://www</p>
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Specialist tour operators also organise excursions. 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 543766; www.lachiesa.dellemore.it; Vallo dello Schiaffo; B&B per person €80-100; ☎ May-Aug; P ☎ ☎ ☎) offers an escape from the cramped coast. An attractive stone-built *agriturismo* (farm-stay), only 1.5km from Peschici, it's set in a huge olive grove, and you can dine on home-grown produce, borrow mountain bikes and enjoy panoramic views from your poolside lounger. Note there is a three-night minimum stay.

Peschici

pop 4300

Perched above a turquoise sea and tempting beach, Peschici clings to the hilly, wooded coastline. It's a pretty resort area, with a tight-knit old walled town of Arabesque white-washed houses. The small town gets crammed in summer, so book in advance. Boats zip across to the Isole Tremiti in high season.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

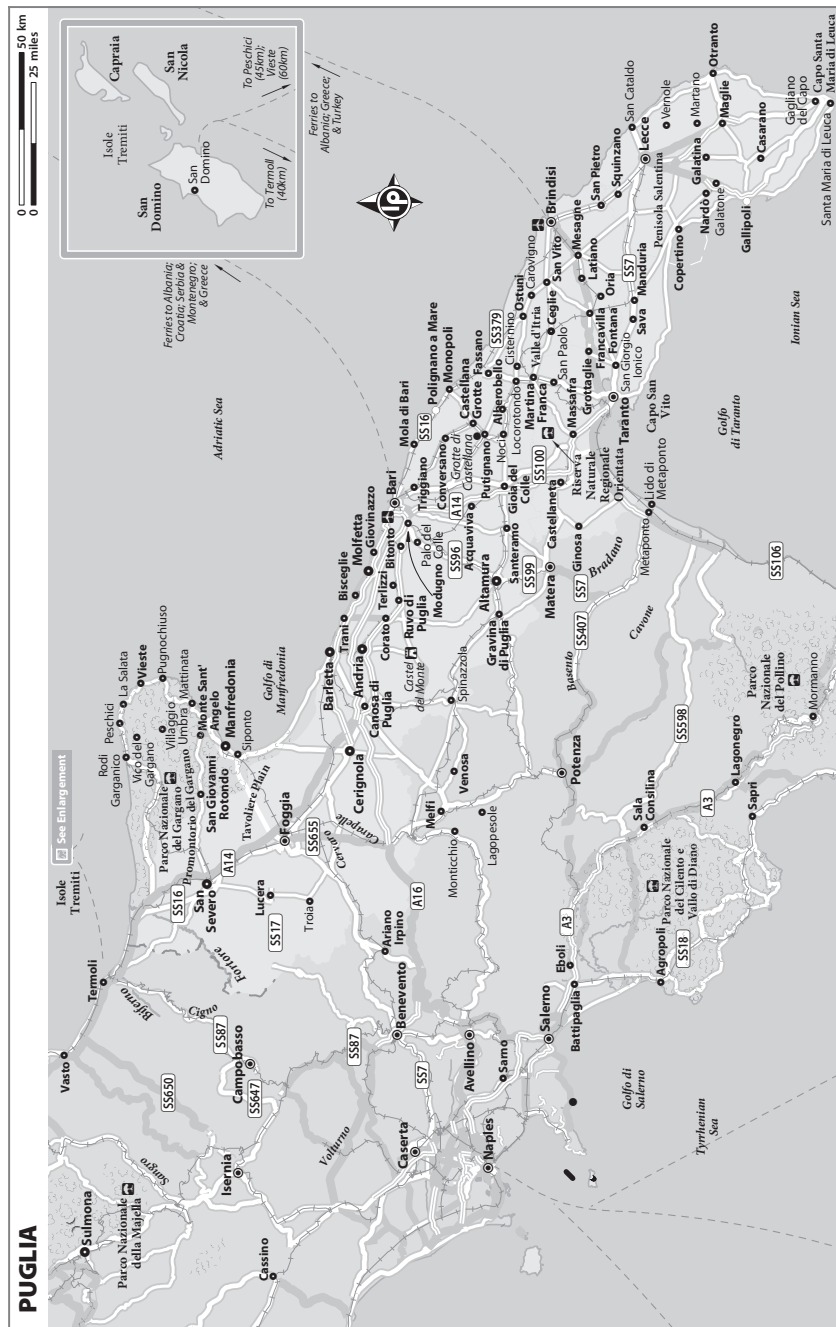
The medieval town occupies the clifftop, while the newer parts extend inland and around the bay. The bus terminal is beside

CAMPING IN STYLE

If your experience of camping is the boy-scout version of flapping tents, freezing nights and eating cold baked beans out of a tin, you will be delighted at the five-star quality of the typical campsites in this southern region of Italy. They are also prolific, particularly in an around the national parks. In the Gargano region alone there are an astonishing 100 campsites, compared to the relatively modest number of *pensiononi* and hotels. If you don't fancy sleeping under canvas (or need a plug for those heated rollers) then consider a bungalow rental.

Virtually all these camping *villaggios* (villages) include well-furnished and equipped bungalows which means you can really economise on eating out, as well as having the advantages of the campsite facilities, which often include tennis courts, swimming pool, a childrens' playground and small supermarket. Bungalows (normally only available for weeklong rentals) start from around €250 for a two-person bungalow or mobile-home rental. Traditional under-canvas campers can expect to pay a daily rate of approximately €18, including the site, tent and car parking space.

Check the following websites for more information and camping listings: www.camping.it; www.camping-italy.net and www.caravanandcampsites.eu.



PUGLIA ON YOUR PLATE

Puglia is home to Italy's most uncorrupted, brawniest, least known vernacular cuisines. It has evolved from *cucina povera* – literally 'cooking of the poor' or peasant cooking: 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 while *trippa* (tripe) is another mainstay. 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 or *ragù* (meat sauce), generally 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 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 *pensionì*, and camp sites line the coast.

Baia San Nicola (☎ 0884 96 42 31; www.baiasannicola.it; camping 2 people, car & tent €27.50, 2-person bungalow per week €270–32; ☹ 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.

Locanda al Castello (☎ 0884 96 40 38; Via 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. Enjoy hearty home cooking in the restaurant (meals €18).

Hotel Timiana (☎ /fax 0884 96 43 21; Viale Libeta 73; r per person €80–90; ☹ May–mid-Sep; ☐ ☹ ☹) Surrounded by well-manicured grounds

800m from the sea, small-scale Timiana is an elegant shuttered building with cool white rooms. It serves delicious traditional dishes. Free shuttle to the beach.

La Collinetta (☎ 0884 96 41 51; Madonna di Loreto; meals €25; ☹ Apr–Sep; ☐) Located 2.5km before Peschici on the coastal road from Vieste. This is a classy restaurant serving fresh fish, with a sunny terrace overlooking the pine trees, olive groves and azure coast.

Also recommended is midrange **Il Villaggio** (☎ 0884 70 61 38; www.holidayvillagevieste.it; Loc Baia di Sfinale; ☹ Apr–Sep), around 4km outside Peschici. It's situated on a beautiful sweep of beach and offers campsites, bungalows and mobile homes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ferrovie del Gargano (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com, in Italian) buses run between Peschici and Vieste (€1.30, 35 minutes, 11 daily). From April to September, daily boats serve the Isole Tremiti (adult/12 to 25 years/under 12 years €30/20/free, one to 1½ hours). For boat tickets and information, try the following:

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

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

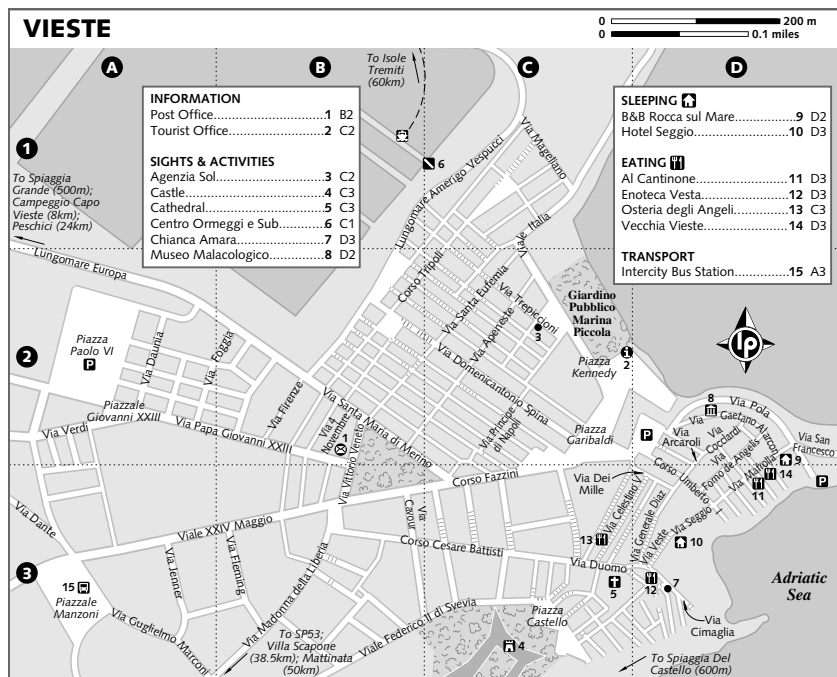
Huge lagoons run along the Adriatic coast north of Peschici. An 800m-wide dune separates the 20km-long Lago di Lesina from the sea, while Lago di Varano is 10km long and even more isolated. Excellent for bird watching, biking trails and walks; see the **Lesina Visitor Centre** (☎ 0882 99 27 27; Via Banchina Vollarò; 🕒 9-1.30pm & 4-8pm) has more information.

Vieste is a small, steep, cobbled town, with a delightful *centro storico*, spilling down the hillside. 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 rock monolith, Scoglio di Pizzomunno. It's packed in summer and ghostly quiet in winter.

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

☑ 8am-1.30pm Mon-Fri & 4-7pm Tue-Thu Oct-Apr, 8am-1.30pm & 3-9pm Mon-Sat May-Sep)

The **Museo Malacologico** (☎ 0884 70 76 88; Via Pola 8; admission free; 🕒 10am-1.30pm & 4-7pm) has three rooms of fossils and molluscs (shells), some enormous and all beautifully patterned and coloured. Prices start at a reasonable €3.



At the port, **Centro Ormeggi e Sub** (☎ 0884 70 79 83; ☹ May-Sep) offers diving courses and rents out sailing boats and motorboats. You can also visit nearby grottos with **Leonarda Motobarche** (☎ 0884 70 13 17; www.motobarcheleonarda.it; per person €13; ☹ Apr-Sep)

From May to September fast boats zoom to the Isole Tremiti (p704).

Superb sandy beaches surround the town: in the south, Spiaggia del Castello, Cala San Felice and Cala Sanguinaria, and due north head for the area known as La Salata.

Take a beach break and go walking or cycling with **Agenzia Sol** (☎ 0884 70 15 58; www.solvieste.it; Via Trepiccioni 5) in the Foresta Umbra.

SLEEPING

Most of Vieste's hotels and *pensioni* are scattered along the beachfront roads north and south of town. Camp sites line the coast.

Campeggio Capo Vieste (☎ 0884 70 63 26; Litoranea Vieste-Peschici Km8; camping 2 people, car & tent €33; ☹ Mar-Oct) This wood-shaded camp site is right by a sandy beach at La Salata, around 8km from Vieste and accessible by bus. Activities include tennis and a sailing school.

B&B Rocca sul Mare (☎ 0884 70 27 19; www.roccasulmare.it; Via Mafrolla 32; r incl breakfast €50-120) 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 original cloisters and there's a vast rooftop terrace with panoramic views. Meals available.

Villa Scapone (☎ 0884 55 92 84; www.villascapone.it; Litoranea Mattinata-Vieste Km11.5; r €55-110; ☹ Apr-Oct; P ☹ ☹ ☹) An attractive villa fantastically sited on the cliffs between Mattinata and Vieste. The hotel terraces, sun decks and elegant rooms all share stunning sea views. 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 €80-150; ☹ Apr-Oct; P ☹ ☹ ☹) A butter-coloured *palazzo* (mansion) in the town's historic centre with steps that spiral down to a pool and sunbathing terrace with the backdrop of the sea. The rooms are modern and plain but it's family-run and has a warm Italian feel.

EATING

Vecchia Vieste (☎ 0884 70 70 83; Via Mafrolla 32; meals €20; ☹ Mar-Oct) A cosy stone-vaulted interior equals a cosy setting for dining on reliably good local

dishes like *orecchiette*, *cozze e rucula* ('little ears' pasta with mussels and rocket).

Osteria degli Angeli (☎ 0884 70 11 12; Via Celestino V 50; meals €20; ☹ late May-Sep) Tucked away on an arched alley near the cathedral is this friendly restaurant offering great cooking in a stone-vaulted interior. Try the *troccoli dell'angeli* (pasta with prawns) or *parmigiana di melanzane* (baked aubergine with mozzarella).

our pick Al Cantinone (☎ 0884 70 77 53; Via Mafrolla 26; meals €20) Run by a charming Italian-Spanish couple who have a passion for cooking; the food is exceptional and exquisitely presented. Try the asparagus risotto or *penne* with *fave* beans, potatoes and *pecorino* cheese. Out of the approximate 100 restaurants in town, this is one of the 15 or so that stays open all year – hooray!

Enoteca Vesta (☎ 0884 70 64 11; Via Duomo 14; meals €25) Housed in a cool, vaulted cave, you can savour a magnificent selection of Puglian wines here to accompany innovative dishes like fried stuffed anchovies with cheese and eggs and baked grey mullet with wild fennel.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Vieste's port is to the north, about a five-minute walk from the tourist office. In summer several companies, including **Navigazione Libera del Golfo** (☎ 0884 70 74 89; www.navlib.it), head to the Isole Tremiti. Tickets can be bought portside and there are several daily boats (€16.50, 1½ hours).

Several companies also offer tours of the caves which pock the Gargano coast – a three-hour tour costs around €13.

SITA (☎ 0881 35 20 11; www.sitabus.it, in Italian) buses run between Vieste and Foggia (€5.70, 2¾ hours, four daily) via Manfredonia, and between Vieste and Monte Sant'Angelo (€4.40), while **Ferrovie del Gargano** (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com, in Italian) services go to Peschici (€1.30, 35 minutes, 11 daily).

Agenzia Sol (see left) also sells bus and boat tickets.

Monte Sant'Angelo

pop 13,800 / elev 796m

One of Europe's most important pilgrimage sites, this isolated mountain-top has an extraordinary atmosphere. 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 – possibly globally these days – at least judging from the surprising number of wi-fi hot spots around town.

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; ☎ 10am–1pm & 3–7pm Apr–Oct) – not a tomb, but a 12th-century baptistry with a deep sunken basin for total immersion. You enter the baptistry through the facade of the **Chiesa di San Pietro**, with its intricate rose window squirming with serpents – 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 vistas.

SLEEPING & EATING

Casa di Pellegrino (☎ 0884 56 23 96; Via Carlo d'Angio; s/d €33/45) The pilgrims' lodge is an institutional but intriguing place, with around 50 rooms above the sanctuary, beside the main car park. 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 checkout.

Hotel Michael (☎ 0884 56 55 19; www.hotelmichael.com; Via Basilica 86; s €45–50, d €65–75; ☎) A small hotel with shuttered windows on the main street, across from the sanctuary, this traditional

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, to become the 457th saint to be canonised by Pope John Paul II.

Miracles were needed to support the canonisation. 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 8 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 blood-stained socks. The **old church**, where he used to say Mass, dates from the 16th century. The spectacular **new church**, designed by Genovese Renzo Piano (who also designed Paris' Pompidou Centre), resembles a huge futuristic seashell, with an interior of boney vaulting. Padre Pio's body now lies in the geometric perfection of the semicircular crypt.

SITA buses run daily to San Giovanni Rotondo from Monte Sant'Angelo (opposite).

place has spacious rooms with extremely pink bedspreads. Ask for a room with a view.

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

SHOPPING

Odori Saporì (☎ 0884 56 39 27; Largo Tomba di Rocari 3) Buy the local speciality here: *ostie ripiene* (or ‘stuffed Hosts’) – wafers resembling the Hosts used at Mass, filled with caramelised almonds. Ask for a taste of the delicious local liquor, *Amaro O Limon* made with olives and lemons.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Monte Sant’Angelo can be accessed by **SITA** (☎ 0881 35 20 11; www.sitabus.it, in Italian) buses from Foggia (€3.45, 1½ hours, three daily) and from Vieste (€4.40, two hours, five daily). Buy your tickets from Bar Esperia next to the sanctuary.

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’ tranquillity – although not its natural beauty. In the low season most tourist facilities close down, and the few permanent residents resume their quiet and isolated lives.

The islands’ main 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 is the traditional administrative centre – 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 (€6 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**. Alongside the beach there is a small cove **Grotta dell’Arene** with calm clear waters for swimming. You can also take a boat trip (€12 from the port) around the island to explore the grottoes: the largest, **Grotta del Bue Marino**, is 70m long. A tour around all three islands costs €17. Diving in the translucent sea is another option with **Tremi Diving Center** (☎ 337 648917; www.tremidivingcenter.com; Via Federico 2, 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 wheels from **Jimmy Bike** (☎ 338 8970909; www.jimmybike.com; bicycle/scooter per day €20/50) 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**, (named after the wild caper plant) is uninhabited. Birdlife is plentiful, with impressive flocks of seagulls. There’s no organised transport, but trips can be negotiated with local fishermen.

Sleeping & Eating

In summer you’ll need to book well ahead and many hotels insist on full board. Camping is forbidden.

Pensione Ristorante-Bar Belvedere (☎ 0882 46 32 82; Via Garibaldi 6, San Domino; €50–140) Located above a bustling year-round cafe, this guest house has plain, pretty rooms with tiled floors and sea views.

Hotel Gabbiano (☎ 0882 46 34 10; www.hotel-gabbiano.com, in Italian; Piazza Belvedere, San Domino; s/d incl breakfast €45-85/€70-120; ♾) Run for more than 30 years by a Neapolitan family, this smart hotel has pastel-coloured rooms with balconies overlooking San Nicola and the sea. Its renowned terrace restaurant offers straight-from-the-sea fish. Facilities include a games room with billiards. Across the road from Pensione Belvedere.

Architiello (☎ 0882 46 30 54; San Nicola; meals €25; ☞ Apr-Oct) A class act with a sea-view terrace, 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 p702), and Termoli in nearby Molise year-round (see p633).

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 nearby Troia and Lucera 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. The **tourist office** (☎ 0881 72 31 41; 1st fl, Via Senatore Emilio Perrone 17; ☞ 8am–2pm Mon–Fri, plus 3–6pm Tue & Thu) is near Piazzale Puglia.

Sights

The 12th-century Romanesque **cathedral** (☞ 7am–12.30pm & 5–8pm), is off Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. 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

Hotel Cicolella (☎ 0881 56 61 11; www.accorhotels.com; Viale XXIV Maggio 60; s/d incl breakfast €100–135/€130–160; ♾) Situated near the railway station, Foggia's finest hotel, a rust-red landmark, was founded more than 100 years ago but is now one of the contemporary Mercure chain. The rooms sport parquet or carpeted floors plus all mod cons, while the restaurant is one of the best in town.

Ristorante Margutta (☎ 0881 70 80 60; Via Piave 33; meals €25) Hung with ivy, this friendly frescoed restaurant is justifiably popular. It specialises in fish dishes, including an excellent *grigliata mista di pesce* (mixed fish grill).

Getting There & Around

BUS

Buses depart from Piazzale Vittorio Veneto, by the train station, for towns throughout Foggia province. Reduced service at weekends.

SITA (☎ 0881 35 20 11; www.sitabus.it, in Italian) and **Ferrovie del Gargano** (☎ 0881 58 72 11; www.ferroviedelgargano.com, in Italian) have services to/from Vieste (€5.70, 2¾ hours, at least five daily), Monte Sant'Angelo (€3.40, 1¾ hours, at least 10 daily) and Lucera (€1.65, 30 minutes, hourly).

TRAIN

There are frequent services to Bari (from €14, 1½ hours) and on to Brindisi (from €13.70, three hours) and Lecce (from €16, 3¾ hours). Northwards, trains head for Ancona (€48, 3½ hours) and Milan (€68, seven to nine hours).

LUCERA

pop 35,036 / elev 219m

Lovely off-the-beaten-track Lucera has one of Puglia's most impressive castles and a handsome old town centre with mellow sand-coloured brick and stone work and chic shops lining wide shiny-stone streets.

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 head-ache 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 a mere 290km from Rome.

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; ☒ 9am-2pm & 3-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-2pm Oct-Mar) is near the cathedral.

Sights

Frederick II's enormous **castle** (admission free; ☒ 9am-2pm year-round & 3-7pm Apr-Sep), shows just what a big fish Lucera once was in the Puglian pond. Built in 1233, it's 14km northwest of Lucera on a rocky hillock surrounded by a perfect 1km pentagonal wall, 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 1301 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** (☒ 8am-noon & 4-7pm) incorporates 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 if it's open at the tourist office.

Sleeping & Eating

B&B Elena degli Angeli (☎ 0881 53 04 46; Piazza Oberdan 3; r €60-80; ☒) There are just four atmospheric rooms here with frescoes, handsome wooden bedheads and dizzily patterned tiles. The small outside terrace has rooftop views. The excellent and stylish downstairs restaurant (meals €25) is run by the owner's son.

our pick **Le Foglie di Acanto** (☎ 349 4514937; www.lefogliediacanto.it; Via Frattarolo 3; s/d €70/100) Run by an enthusiastic brother and sister team this former

16th-century **palazzo** has elaborately frescoed ceilings, sumptuous floor tiles, exquisite antiques and a charming shady garden. Breakfast features organic jams and the like.

La Tavernetta (☎ 0881 52 00 55; Via Schiavone 7; pizzas from €4; ☒ Tue-Sun) Located in a large exposed-brick cellar with jaunty tablecloths and an enthusiastic young staff, the crispy wood-fired pizzas are excellent. La Tavernetta is behind the cathedral.

Il Cortiletto (☎ 0881 54 25 54; Via de Nicastrì 26) A superb restaurant with a barrel-vault interior, central courtyard and a menu that includes traditional dishes like *orecchiette* with *cimie di rape* (bitter greens) and *cozze pelose* (Puglia's indigenous clams).

Getting There & Away

Regular SITA and Ferrovie del Gargano buses (€1.65, 30 minutes) run to Lucera from Foggia (p705).

TRANI

pop 53,520

Trani is a Pugliese gem. Shimmering with a mother-of-pearl light, it has a sophisticated feel, particularly in summer when well-heeled visitors pack the diminutive array of marina-side bars. Its Norman cathedral and piazza, perched above the sea, are an unforgettable sight – especially after a few glasses of the local sweet tipple, Moscato di Trani.

The historic centre with its medieval churches and glossy stone streets 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.

Orientation & Information

From the train station, Via Cavour leads through Piazza della Repubblica to Piazza Plebiscito and the public gardens. Turn left for the harbour and cathedral.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0883 58 88 30; www.traniweb.it; 1st fl, Palazzo Palmieri, Piazza Trieste 10; ☒ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri, plus 3.30-5.30pm Tue & Thu) is 200m south of the cathedral.

Sights

Surrounded by a rare light and space, the dramatic seafront **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☒ 8.15am-12.15pm & 3.15-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 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 magnificent original bronze doors (now displayed inside) were cast by Barisano da Trani, an accomplished 12th-century artisan.

The interior of the cathedral reflects typical Norman simplicity, and is lined by colonnades. Near the main altar are 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.

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 one of four former synagogues in the ancient Jewish quarter. They were all converted to churches in the 14th century. Inside is a beautiful Byzantine painting of Madonna dei Martiri.

Sleeping

B&B Trani (☎ 0883 50 61 76; www.bbtrani.it; Via Leopardi 29; s/d incl breakfast €33-40/56-68) 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 rooftop terrace with fabulous views and a pretty-in-pink breakfast room.

Albergo Lucy (☎ 0883 48 10 22; www.albergolucy.com; Piazza Plebiscito 11; d/tr/q €60/80/100) 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; www.hotelregia.it; Piazza del Duomo 2; s/d €120-130/130-150; ☹) A lone building facing the cathedral, the un-

derstated grandeur of 18th-century Palazzo Filisio houses a charming hotel. Rooms are sober and stylish, and there's a good restaurant (meals €30).

Eating

Osteria Ferro e Fuoco (☎ 0883 58 73 87; Piazza Mazzini 8; meals €25) This new kid on the block serves reliably good dishes including fried ricotta antipasti and roasted veal chops. It has a charming position on the piazza with terrace seating overlooking time-worn traditional buildings adorned with washing.

La Darsena (☎ 0883 48 73 33; Via Statuti Marittimi 98; meals €30; ☹ Tue-Sun) Renowned for its seafood, La Darsena is housed in a waterfront *palazzo*. Outside tables are shielded by thick greenery while inside photos of old Puglia cover the walls beneath a huge wrought-iron dragon chandelier.

Cortefiore (☎ 0883 50 84 02; Via Ognissanti 18; meals €30; ☹ Tue-Sun) Enjoys a light summery feel with a marquee-conservatory arrangement, wooden decking, buttercup-yellow tablecloths and bevies of friendly waiters. The wines are excellent and the cooking is delicious, with dishes such as pasta with monkfish and clams.

Getting There & Away

STP (☎ 0883 49 18 00; www.stpspa.it, in Italian) travels along the coast and inland, serving Barletta (€1.10, 30 minutes, half-hourly) and Bari (€2.95, 45 minutes, frequent). Services depart from **Bar Stazione** (Piazza XX Settembre 23), 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 (€3.50, 30 to 60 minutes, frequent) and Foggia (€6.50, 40 minutes, frequent) and is easily reached from other coastal towns.

AROUND TRANI

Barletta

pop 92,094

Barletta is a modern prosperous town – as big as Lecce – and has a 4th-century bronze Colossus and a splendid art gallery (but little else in the way of sights).

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 an astonishing (and incongruous) sight: the 5m-high Roman **Colossus**, the largest surviving Roman bronze in the world and a bad-tempered fellow he looks too. 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 **Pinacoteca Giuseppe de Nittis** (☎ 0883 57 86 15; www.pinacotecadenittis.it; Via Cialdini 75; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) has palatial surrounds and an impressive display of the work of local hero de Nittis (1846-1884), the only Italian impressionist, plus excellent temporary exhibitions.

From the bus station, **STP** (☎ 0883 49 18 00; www.stpspa.it) travels to Trani (€1.10, 30 minutes, half-hourly) and Bari (€3.45, one hour 20 minutes).

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), an unearthly geometric shape on a hilltop, from miles away. 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.

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. Many of the towers have washing rooms – Frederick II, like the Arab world he admired, set great store by cleanliness.

You need your own wheels to get here, otherwise there is a sporadic daily service from nearby Andria.

BARI

pop 328,500

'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. A spanking new suburban business centre of glass skyscrapers has also recently opened.

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.

On a darker note, the fourth-largest mafia clan in Italy – and among the most feared – is the *Sacra Corona Unita*; a youthful Yakuza-style group operating from the notorious San Paolo suburb.

Orientation

Orient yourself from Piazza Aldo Moro in front of the main train station. Any of the streets heading north from Piazza Aldo Moro will take you to Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, which separates the old and new parts of the city, and further north to the ferry terminal.

Information

There are plenty of banks and ATMs in Bari. **CTS** (☎ 080 555 99 16; Via Postiglione 27) Good for student travel and discount flights.

Hospital (☎ 080 557 57 24; Piazza Cesare)

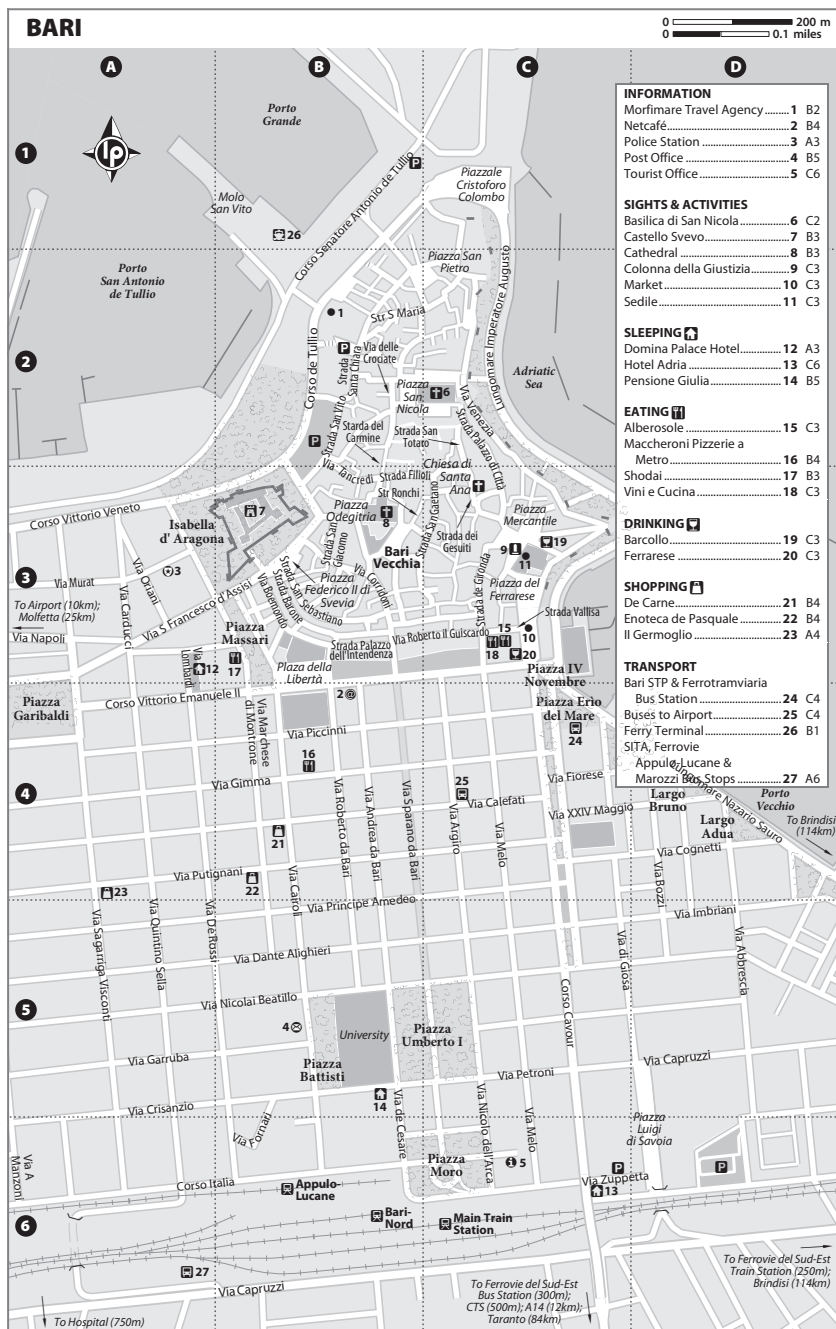
Morfimare Travel Agency (☎ 080 578 98 11; www.morfimare.it; Corso de Tullio 36-40) Ferry bookings.

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 Murat 4)

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

Tourist office (☎ 080 990 93 41; www.pugliaturismo.com; 1st fl, Piazza 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** (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, built to house the relics of St Nicholas (better known as Father Christmas), which were stolen from Turkey in 1087 by local 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.

A brief walk south along Via delle Crociate brings you to the 11th-century Romanesque **cathedral** (Piazza Odegittia; ☎ 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; ☎ 083 184 00 09; Piazza Federico II di Svevia; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Thu-Tue) 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. Permanent and temporary art exhibitions are held here.

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

Accommodation here tends to be bland and overpriced, aimed at business clientele. The Bari Vecchia is the most attractive part of town to stay, and is convenient for the ferry terminal.

Pensione Giulia (☎ 080 521 66 30; www.hotelpensionegiulia.it; Via Crisanzio 12; s/d €60/75, without bathroom €50/65) Near the train station, this popular place is family run with rooms that resemble a hospital ward, until you look up – most rooms sport truly lovely original frescoes (go for room 21 if you are angelically inclined). The bathrooms are the built-in boxy variety, so make sure you know your room-mate well.

Hotel Adria (☎ 080 524 66 99; www.adriahotelbari.com; Via Zuppetta 10; s/d €70/110; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) A dusky-pink building fronted by wrought-iron balconies, this is a great choice, with comfortable, good-value rooms that are bright and modern. Extras include Sky TV and a roof garden.

Domina Palace Hotel (☎ 080 521 65 51; www.dominahotels.com; Via Lombardi 13; s/d €195/260; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Look past the dated '60s-style exterior and this is an oasis of luxury, with plush, elegant rooms and a renowned rooftop restaurant. Meals at the on-site Murat (€30), include refined dishes like honey-glazed turkey with truffle sauce, complemented by fantastic views.

Eating

Maccheroni Pizzeria a Metro (☎ 080 521 33 56; Via Gimma 90; pizzas €7-9) Not the place for a candlelit dinner for two, but great if you love pizza and

people – equally. The long and short of it is that the whole table's order is made into one continuous pizza, served by the metre and, most importantly, delicious.

Vini e Cucina (☎ 338 212 03 91; Strada Vallisa 23; meals €10; ☹ Mon-Sat) Run by the same family for more than a century, this boisterous *osteria* (wine bar serving some food) chalks up its daily specials of well-prepared and filling Pugliese dishes. Grab a seat in the brick-flanked tunnel of a dining room and wait (and wait) to be served by the one impressively indefatigable waiter.

Shodai (☎ 080 528 35 89; Piazza Massari, 23; meals €25) Bari's first Japanese restaurant is deservedly popular. Enjoy Asian classics like vegetable tempura, salmon sashimi and tuna sushi in a suitably Zen-inspired interior, with tubular steel furniture complemented by a minimalist black-and-red colour scheme.

Alberosole (☎ 080 523 54 46; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 13; meals €30; ☹ Tue-Sun Sep-Jul) Dine alongside bankers in Brioni suits at this elegant restaurant. The contemporary menu is complemented by a traditional dining room, complete with old stone floor and cathedral ceiling. The *linguine con gamberi di Gallipoli, pesto di fave fresche e zenzero* (linguine with prawns, fava bean pesto and ginger) comes recommended. Reserve ahead.

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

Drinking

Like most student towns, Bari is good for a night out. Kick start your evening with an *aperitivo* at **Ferrarese** (☎ 392 0744474; Piazza Ferrarese 1) overlooking the harbour on Piazza Ferrarese. Move on to Piazza Mercantile, where Bari's young and beautiful congregate. A good start is **Barcollo** (☎ 080 521 38 89; Piazza Mercantile 69/70; cocktails €6; ☹ 8am-3am), where you can lounge

on brilliant-red banquettes or sit outside on the twinkling square supping a cocktail and nibbling work-of-art hors d'oeuvres.

Shopping

Bari is superb for shopping. For designer shops and the main Italian chains, head for Via Sparano da Bari. Foodies are similarly well catered for with delis and gourmet shops located throughout the city.

De Carne (☎ 080 521 96 76; Via Calefati 128; ☹ 8am-2pm & 5-8.40pm Mon-Wed, Fri & Sat, 8am-2pm Thu) Breathe in delicious scents and seriously indulge by buying fine regional produce at this venerable delicatessen.

Il Germoglio (☎ 080 524 27 72; Via Putignani 204; ☹ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat) A treasure trove of organic jams and cheeses.

Enoteca de Pasquale (☎ 080 521 31 92; Via Marchese di Montrone 87; ☹ 8am-2pm & 4-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Stock up on Puglian wines.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Bari's Palese **airport** (BRI; ☎ 080 580 02 00; www.seap-puglia.it) is served by a host of international and budget airlines, including British Airways, Alitalia, Hapag-Lloyd Express and Ryanair.

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 (p718) to Greece. Tariffs can be up to one-third cheaper outside mid-July to late August. Bicycles are normally free.

The main companies and their routes:

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

FERRY CROSSINGS FROM BARI

Destination	Cost (€) seat/cabin/car*	Duration (hr)
Bar, Montenegro	112/150/159	9
Cephalonia, Greece	140/208/130	15½
Corfu, Greece	143/208/134	11
Durrës, Albania	52/93/91	8
Igoumenitsa, Greece	140/208/130	10-12
Patras, Greece	142/207/133	16½

* cost of a return ticket in high season

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 p708); to Bar 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 Patrasso (6.30pm daily, April to September).

Superfast (☎ 080 528 28 28; www.superfast.com) To Igoumenitsa, Patras and Corfu, in Greece. 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 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, plus **Marozzi** (☎ 080 556 24 46; www.marozzi.it) buses for Rome (€35, eight hours, 8.35 am, 1pm, 4pm, 5pm, 11.50pm – the overnight bus departs from Piazza Moro) and other long-distance destinations.

Piazza Eroi del Mare is the terminal for **STP** (☎ 080 505 82 80; www.stpspa.it) buses serving Andria (€3.45, 1½ hours, seven daily) and Trani (€2.95, 45 minutes, frequent). **Ferrottramviaria** (☎ 080 578 95 42; www.ferrovie.nordbarese.it) runs frequent buses to Andria (€3.80, one hour) and Ruvo di Puglia (€3, 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 Moro, for Brindisi (€6.60, 23 to 24 hours, four daily Monday to Saturday), Taranto (€5.30, 1¾ to 2½ hours, frequent), Alberobello (€3.60, 1½ hours) and on to Locorotondo and Martina Franca, Grotte di Castellana (€2.60, one hour) and Ostuni (€4.90, two hours).

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 (from €68, eight to 9½ hours) and Rome (from €36, five hours).

Frequent trains serve elsewhere in Puglia, including Foggia (from €14, 1½ hours) and Brindisi (from €6.80, 1¼ hours).

Ferrovie Bari-Nord (☎ 080 578 95 42; www.ferrovie.nordbarese.it) goes to the airport (€1.10, 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 (€2.90, one hour, at least hourly), Matera (€4.35, 1½ hours, 12 daily) and Potenza (€9.10, four hours, four daily).

FSE trains (☎ 080 546 21 11; www.fseonline.it, in Italian) head for the towns of Alberobello (€4.10, 1½ hours, hourly), Martina Franca (€4.90, two hours, hourly) and Taranto (from €7.40, 2½ 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 Capruzzi for about 500m.

Getting Around

Central Bari is compact – a 15-minute walk will take you from Piazza Moro to the old town. For the ferry terminal take bus 20 from Piazza Moro (€1.10).

Street parking is migraine-inducing. 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.

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

To get to the airport, take the Cotrap bus (€4.50) which leaves regularly from the main train station. A taxi trip from the airport to town costs around €24.

AROUND BARI

Polignano a Mare

Dip into this spectacularly positioned small town if you can. Located around 34km south of Bari on the S16 coastal road, **Polignano a Mare** is built on the edge of a craggy ravine pockmarked with caves.

On Sunday the *logge* (balconies) are crowded with day-trippers from Bari who come here to view the crashing waves, visit the caves and crowd out the *cornetterias* (shops specialising in Italian croissants) in the atmospheric *centro storico*. The town is thought to be one of the most important ancient settlements in Puglia and was later inhabited by successive invaders ranging from the Huns to the Normans. There are several

baroque churches, an imposing Norman monastery and the medieval **Porta Grande**, the only access to the historic centre until the 18th century. You can still see the holes that activated the heavy drawbridge and the openings from where boiling oil was poured onto any unwelcome visitors to town.

There are a handful of hotels and B&Bs in town. **Paluada** (☎ 328 2858658; www.paluada.it; Via Martiri di Dogali 60; s €38-50, d €76-100) is conveniently located with pleasant modern rooms and easy parking nearby. You can enjoy tasty Spanish-style *pinchos* (snacks) at **Boca Chica** (☎ 333 3388496; Piazza San Benedetto; from €2.50) right on this pleasant piazza where locals congregate, children play and lovers stroll arm-in-arm. Several operators organise boat trips to the grottoes, including **Dorino** (☎ 329 64659 04), costing around €20 per person.

Although there is a twice-daily bus service from Bari, your own car is the best way to reach Polignano.

MURCIA 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 is riddled with holes and ravines through which small streams and rivers gurggle, creating what is, in effect, a giant sponge. At the heart of the Murgia 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 criss-crossed 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* (manor farms). 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 (€8, on the half-hour); and a 3km, two-hour tour (€13, on the hour) 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 Sirio** (☎ 080 499 82 11; ☎ admission €3), with its telescope and solar filters allowing for maximum solar-system visibility. Guided visits only with advance notification.

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 (€1.20).

Alberobello

pop 10,930

Unesco World Heritage Site Alberobello resembles a mini urban sprawl – for gnomes. The Zona dei Trulli on the western hill of town is a dense mass of 1500 beehive-shaped houses, white-tipped as if dusted by snow. These dry-stone buildings are made from local limestone, none older than the 14th century. Inhabitants do not wear pointy hats, but they do sell anything a visitor might want, from miniature *trulli* to 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 to the Piazza del Popolo where Belvedere Trulli offers fabulous views over the whole higgledy-piggledy picture.

INFORMATION

Tourist information office (☎ 080 432 28 22; www.prolocoalberobello.it; Monte Nero 1; ☹ 9am-7.30pm) Local office in the Zona dei Trulli.

Tourist office (☎ 080 432 51 71; Piazza del Popolo; ☹ 8am-1pm Mon-Fri, plus 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 most do have a strategically located basket for a donation.

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 below).

In the modern part of town, the 18th-century **Trullo Sovrano** (☎ 080 432 60 30; www.trullosovrano.it; Piazza Sacramento; admission €1.50; ☹ 10am-6pm) 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 which include a re-created bakery, bedroom and kitchen. The souvenir shop here has a wealth of literature on the town and surrounding area.

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; camping 2 people, car & tent €26.50, bungalows per person €22-30, *trulli* per person €30-44; 📍 🚻 🚰) This well-equipped camp site is 1.5km out of town. It has a restaurant, market, two swimming pools, ten-

nis courts and bicycle hire, and you can also rent *trulli* or mini-apartments.

Trullidea (☎ 080 432 38 60; www.trullidea.it; Via Monte San Gabriele 1; 2-person *trulli* from €63-149) A series of 20 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.

our pick Trattoria Amatulli (☎ 080 432 29 79; Via Garibaldi 13; meals €15; ☹ Tue-Sun) Excellent trattoria with a cheerily cluttered interior papered with photos of smiley diners, plus superb down-to-earth dishes like *orecchietta al ragu con carne* ('little ears' pasta in a meat-and-tomato based sauce). Wash it down with the surprisingly drinkable house wine costing the lordly sum of €4 a litre.

La Cantina (☎ 080 432 34 73; Vico Lippolis 8; meals €20; ☹ Wed-Mon Jul-Sep) Although tourists have discovered this place, it has maintained the high standards established back in 1958. There are just seven tables and one frenetic waiter, who serves dishes like *tagliolina* (fettuccine-style pasta) with porcini mushrooms and chestnuts, grilled meats and superb seasonal vegetables.

Il Poeta Contadino (☎ 080 432 19 17; Via Indipendenza 21; meals €60; ☹ Tue-Sun Feb-Dec) The dining room here has a medieval banqueting feel with its sumptuous decor and chandeliers. Although the tasting menu will set you back a cool €1000, you can dine for a lot less on dishes like guinea fowl with goose ham and black truffle (€23) or aubergine ravioli, seafood sauce and courgette julienne (€15).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Alberobello is easily accessible from Bari (€4.10, 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) has an extraordinarily beautiful and whisper-quiet *centro storico*, where everything is shimmering white aside from the blood-red geraniums that tumble from the window boxes. Situated 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 public garden, you can enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding valley. You enter the historic quarter directly across from here.

The **tourist office** (☎ 080 431 30 99; www.proloco.locorotondo.it; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 27; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) is also in this part of town and offers free internet access.

Not only is this deepest *trulli* country, but it's also the 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.locorotondodoc.com; Via Madonna della Catena 99) run by congenial Oronzo Mastro.

Truddhi (☎ 080 443 13 26; www.trulliresidence.it; C da Trito 292; per week €450-741) is a small cluster of self-catering *trulli* in the hamlet of Trito 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'Curduhn** (☎ 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 and you can expect good service and a buzzing atmosphere.

In a narrow side street next to an ancient tunnel 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* with various vegetable sidekicks. The antipasto is also 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 12,050

An appealing hilltop town, slow-paced, whitewashed Cisternino has a charming *centro storico* beyond the bland modern outskirts. 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.

Just outside the historic centre, the **tourist office** (☎ 080 444 77 38; www.prolococisternino.it; Via San Quirico 18 ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) can advise on B&Bs in the historic centre, but be prepared to suitcase-trundle, as parking can be a problem.

Cisternino has a grand tradition of *for-nello pronto* (ready-to-go roast or grilled meat) and in numerous butchers' 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), also serving up Pugliese favourites such as *fave e verdura* (beans and greens), which will bring a smile to the face of any vegetarian.

Cisternino is accessible by regular trains from Bari (€5.10, 45 minutes, three daily) on the FSE Bari–Taranto train line.

Martina Franca

pop 49,100

The old quarter of this town has a southern Spain feel to it, with its blinding white houses, blood-red geraniums and lively, lived-in feel. There are graceful baroque and rococo buildings here too, plus airy piazzas and curlicue iron-work balconies that are so wide (and neighbourly) above the narrow streets that they almost touch. 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 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 Figuera 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-Sat, 4.30-7pm Tue & Thu, 9am-12.30pm Sat) is within Palazzo Ducale (part of the Bibliotece Comunale).

LUSH LOCATIONS

Puglia's most luxurious *masserias* (manor farms) 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 Coccaro (☎ 080 482 93 10; www.masseriatorrecoccaro.com; Contrada Coccaro 8, Savellettri di Fasano; d €333-466; 🏠 🚗 📶), around 10km from Locorotondo, has a hacienda feel. This super-chic yet countrified *masseria* is housed in an evocative fortified farmhouse, with a glorious spa set in a cave, a beach-style swimming pool, spa and restaurant (meals €90). Next door is **Masseria Maizza** (www.masseriatormaizza.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 €300-490, ste €430-650; 🏠 🚗 📶) with sumptuous rooms and a superb spa.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

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 is overlooked by the 18th-century **Basilica di San Martino**, its centrepiece city patron, St Martin, swinging a sword and sharing his cloak with a beggar.

Walkers can ask for the *Carta dei Sentieri del Bosco delle Pianelle* (free) from the tourist office which maps out 10 walks, with varying distances and level of difficulty, in the nearby **Bosco delle Pianelle** (around 10km west of town). This lush woodland is part of the larger **Riserva Naturale Regionale Orientata** which covers 1206 hectares of lofty trees, including silver ash and elm, and flora and fauna that includes wild orchids and a rich and varied birdlife with kestrels, owls, buzzards, hoopoe and sparrow hawks.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Festival della Valle d'Itria is an annual music festival (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.festivaldellavalleditria.it; 🕒 10am-1pm Mon-Fri) in the Palazzo Ducale.

SLEEPING & EATING

B&B San Martino (☎ 080 48 56 01; <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/bed-and-breakfast-sanmartino>; Via Abate Figuera 32; 2-person

apt €90-160, per week €300-700; 🏠 🚗 📶) A stylish B&B in an historic palace with rooms overlooking gracious Piazza XX Settembre. The apartments have exposed stone walls, shiny parquet floors, wrought-iron beds and small kitchenettes. Guests have the use of a pool some 3km away.

Villaggio In (☎ 080 480 50 21; www.villaggioin.it; Via Arco Grassi 8; apt per week for 2/3/4/5/6 people €335-420/380-550/450-895/615-710/680-820) These charming arched apartments are located in original *centro storico* homes with steep stairs and small rooms. Antiques and whitewashed walls complete the traditional look.

Ciacco (☎ 080 480 04 72; Via Conte 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 tucked down a narrow pedestrian lane a couple of streets in from the Chiesa del Carmine.

Due Gnelli (☎ 080 430 28 27; Piazza Plebiscito 9; pizzas from €4.50, meals €20; 🍷 Thu-Tue) Step into this shiny black-and-white dining space to enjoy surprisingly traditional dishes, like *orecchiette alle cime di rape* ('little ears' pasta with turnip tops) and *fritto misto* (fried seafood). Tables outside overlook this lovely square.

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 with salamis and sausages the specialities.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Take the **FSE** (☎ 080 546 21 11) train from Bari (€4.90, two hours, hourly) or Taranto (€2.40, 40 minutes, seven daily).

FSE buses serve Alberobello (€1.50, 30 minutes, five daily Monday to Saturday) and Lecce (€6, 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 pearly white tiara, extending across three hills, with the magnificent gem of a cathedral as its sparkling centre-piece. 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. 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; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-9pm Mon-Fri, 5.30-8.30pm Sat & Sun), off Piazza della Libertà, can organise guided visits of the town and bike rental.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **Museo di Civiltà 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, is most famous for 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** with its superbly preserved rose window.

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.olivetibruno.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'Oronzio around town.

SLEEPING

Le Sole Blu (☎ 0831 30 38 56; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 16; s €30-40, d €60-80) In the 18th-century (rather than medieval) part of town, there is just one room available here and it is delightful: large and homey with comfortable furniture, a separate entrance and a visiting fluffy white cat.

La Terra (☎ 0831 33 66 51; www.laterrahotel.it; Via Petrarolo; s €80-105, d €130-170 (P) (24)) This former 13th-century palace offers atmospheric and stylish accommodation with original niches, dark-wood beams and furniture, and contrasting light stonework and whitewash. The result is a cool contemporary look. The bar is as cavernous as they come – it is tunnelled out of a cave.

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, whitewashed 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; 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 €160-180) Another 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. Note that there's a one-week minimum stay in August.

EATING

Osteria Piazzetta Cattedrale (☎ 0831 33 50 26; Via Arcidiacono Trinchera 7; meals €25; (V)) Just beyond the arch opposite Ostuni's cathedral is this tiny little hostelry serving up magical food. The menu includes plenty of vegetarian options, like *frittelle di verdure miste profumate alla menta su salsa de yogurt* (vegetable

fritter with a yoghurt and mint sauce). 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 laid-back place serves great Pugliese food, specialising in roasted meats. To get here, face the cathedral's south wall and turn right through two archways 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) This restaurant has a wonderful location on the old city wall. Revel in the rolling views from the terrace or relax in the elegant interior while you feast on top-notch local cuisine, with fish and seafood the speciality. Try the prawns from Gallipoli.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

STP buses run to Brindisi (€2.90, 50 minutes, six daily), leaving from Piazza Italia in the newer part of Ostuni, and to Martina Franca (€2, 45 minutes, five daily).

Trains run frequently to Brindisi (€3, 30 minutes) and Bari (€4.90, two hours). 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. An intriguing, if ghoulish, sight is the cathedral's **Cripta delle Mummie** (Crypt of the Mummies), where 11 mummified corpses of former monks are still preserved. 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 2307506; www.borgodiوريا.it; ste €70-75; ☒), run by the helpful Francesco Pipino, recommended by readers and offering 10 characterful self-catering suites (with kitchenettes) 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 main Trenitalia line and there are frequent serves from both Brindisi and Taranto. You can also connect with Ostuni and change at Francavilla Fontana for Alberobello and Martina Franca.

BRINDISI

pop 87,900

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

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.

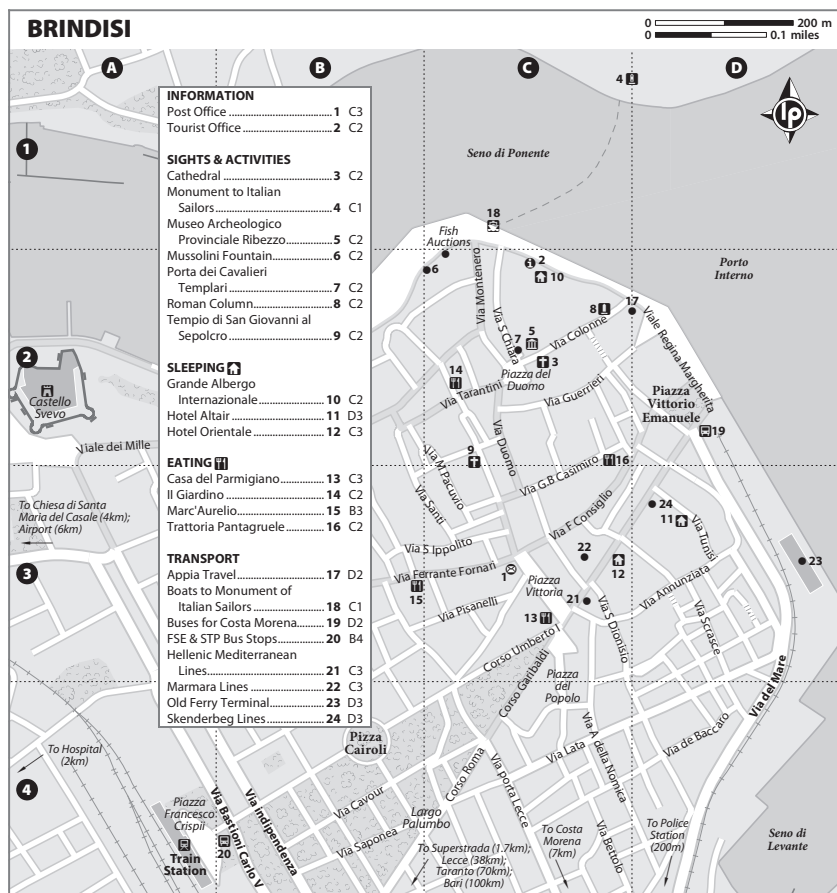
The old port is about 1km from the train station along Corso Umberto I, which leads into Corso Garibaldi where there are numerous cafes, shops, ferry companies and travel agencies.

Information

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

THE BIG BELCHER

It's not on the 'A' list, it's on the 'P' (for pollution) list. The smoking tower stacks that welcome you to Brindisi are from its major power plant, which the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has listed as number nine in Europe for the amount of CO₂ produced, some 22.8 million tonnes annually. As we all know by now, CO₂ is recognised as being one of the principal causes of global warming and the EU directive is to reduce this by 30% by 2020. On a more flippant note, this is an example of how, when it comes to industrial big brother, the unrelenting no-smoking ban in Italy does not appear to extend to the country's ultimate big puffer.



Ferries (www.ferries.gr) Details of ferry fares and time-tables to Greek destinations.

Hospital (☎ 0831 53 71 11; SS7 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 Jul & Aug) Has a wealth of information and brochures on the area. If you are interested in pedal power, pick up *Le Vie Verdi* map (www.cidomici.it) with eight bicycling routes in the Brindisi area, ranging from 6km to 30km.

Sights & Activities

For centuries, two great **Roman columns** marked the imperial Via Appia terminus at Brindisi.

One was presented to the town of Lecce (p723) 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 west 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; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Fri & Sun, 8am-noon Sat) 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), is a square brown bulk of Norman stone conforming to the circular plan the Templars so loved.

Abutting the cathedral's north side is the superb **Museo Archeologico Provinciale Ribezzo** (☎ 0831 56 55 08; Piazza del Duomo 8; admission free; ☎ 9.30am–1.30pm Tue–Sat, plus Sun, 3.30–6.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 10am–1pm & 5–8pm Sun) which was substantially expanded in 2009 and now covers several floors with well-documented exhibits (in English) including some 3000 bronze sculptures and fragments in Hellenistic Greek style, terracotta figurines from the 7th century, and Roman statues and heads (not always together).

Another main sight is the **Chiesa di Santa Maria del Casale** (☎ 8am–8pm), located 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.

Take one of the regular boats (return ticket bought on land/board €1.80/1.75) on Viale Regina Margherita across the harbour to the **Monument to Italian Sailors**, erected by Mussolini in 1933, for a wonderful view of Brindisi's waterfront.

Sleeping

Hotel Altair (☎ 0831 56 22 89; Via Giudea 4; s €30, d €40–50) Hidden in a sidestreet off Corso Garibaldi, this modest hotel has seen better days; the rooms' arched high ceilings suggest a more glamorous past. It's ideal for early morning departures, though, as the port bus stop is a short walk away.

Hotel Orientale (☎ 0831 56 84 51; Corso Garibaldi 40; www.hotelorientale.it; s/d €98/130; P) This sleek, modern hotel overlooks the long palm-lined *corso*. The decor has benefited from a recent revamp and rooms have shiny parquet floors, contemporarily tiled bathrooms and Sky TV. A new fitness centre, private car park and (rare) cooked breakfast option are agreeable extras.

Grande Albergo Internazionale (☎ 0831 52 34 73; www.albergointernazionale.it; Viale Regina Margherita 23; s/d €160/250; P) This 19th-century palace was built for English merchants en route to Bombay and the Raj. It has great harbour views, large rooms with grandly draped cur-

tains, and is the kind of place you could imagine maiden aunts coming on holiday for the sea air.

Eating

Il Giardino (☎ 0831 22 40 26; Via Tarantini 14–18; meals €30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat, lunch Sun) Established more than 40 years ago in a restored 15th-century *palazzo*, sophisticated Il Giardino serves refined seafood and meat dishes in a delightful garden setting.

Trattoria Pantagruelle (☎ 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 three blocks from the waterfront serves up excellent fish and grilled meats, as well as scrumptious home-made desserts.

Marc Aurelio (☎ 0831 52 17 73; Via Ferrante Fornari 26; meals €55; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue–Sat, lunch Sun) In a beautiful, historic building, this classy restaurant and oyster bar is the place for simple, exquisitely cooked seafood. Finish with the local speciality *spumone* (a hazelnut ice-cream confection). There's a garden terrace.

Casa del Parmigiano (Piazza Vittoria 11) A wonderful shop for cheese lovers, selling great wheels of *parmigiano* and local and national cheeses.

Getting There & Away

AIR

From **Papola Casale** (BDS; www.seap-puglia.it), Brindisi's small airport, there are internal flights to Rome, Naples and Milan. The airport is served mainly by Alitalia, AirOne and Myair. There are also direct flights from London Stansted with Ryanair. Flights are scarce in winter.

Major and local car-rental firms are represented at the airport and there are regular SITA buses to Lecce (€5.30, 50 minutes, eight daily) and STP buses to central Brindisi (€3.30, 40 minutes, nine daily).

BOAT

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

Most ferry companies operate from June to August. All have offices at Costa Morena (the newer port), and the major ones also

FERRY CROSSINGS FROM BRINDISI

Destination	Cost (€)* seat/bed**/car	Duration (hr)
Cesme, Turkey	88/122/159	19
Corfu, Greece	132/185/109	12
Cephalonia, Greece	146/226/113	12
Igoumenitsa, Greece	114/193/120	9-12
Patras, Greece	133/194/110	15-20
Vlore, Albania	93/122/97	8½

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

have offices in town. There's a tax of €10 per person and car. Check in at least two hours before departure or you risk losing your reservation.

Hellenic Mediterranean Lines (☎ 0831 52 85 31; www.hml.it; Corso Garibaldi 8) To Corfu, Igoumenitsa and Patras (April to October), to Cefalonia (June to September) and the Ionian islands (July and August).

Marmara Lines (☎ 0831 56 86 33; www.marmara.lines.com; Corso Garibaldi 19) Twice weekly ferry to Cesme (Turkey). Departs Saturday and Wednesday at 10.30am and 11.30am respectively.

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

SNAP (☎ 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 (€2.90, 50 minutes, six daily) and Lecce (€3.30, 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. **Ferrovie del Sud-Est** (FSE; ☎ 800 07 90 90) buses serving local towns also leave from here.

Marozzi (☎ 0831 52 16 84) runs to Rome's Stazione Tiburtina (€36 to €40, 8½ hours, four daily). **Appia Travel** (☎ 0831 52 16 84; Viale Regina Margherita 8-9) sells tickets.

TRAIN

Brindisi is on the main Trenitalia (p900) train line and trains run regularly to Bari (from €6.80, 1¼ hours), Lecce (from €8.10, 30 minutes) and Taranto (from €5.10, 1¼ hours). Other destinations include Milan (€65 to €86, 9½ hours) and Rome (€47 to €67, six hours).

Getting Around

A free minibus connects the train station and old ferry terminal with Costa Morena. It de-

parts two hours before boat departures. You'll need a valid ferry ticket.

To reach the airport take the Cotrap bus from Via Bastioni Carlo V (€5, 15 minutes).

LECCE

pop 91,600

Central, historic Lecce is a beautiful baroque town; a glorious architectural confection of palaces and churches intricately sculpted from the soft local sandstone. It is a city full of surprises: one minute you are perusing sleek designer fashions from Milan, the next you are faced with a church, dizzyingly decorated with 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 facade 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. There are also some excellent restaurants here, and the city is 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 cafe.

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

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

Liberrima (☎ 0832 24 26 26; Corte del Cicala 1; ☎ 10am-midnight Tue-Sat, 4.30pm-midnight Sun & Mon) Stylish bookshop with guides and music.

Police station (☎ 0832 69 11 11; Viale Otranto 1)

Post office (Piazza Libertini)

Salento Time (☎ 0832 30 36 86; www.salentotime.it; Via Revina Isabella 22; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) Independent tourist office which can provide help with accommodation, as well as bike rental (per day €10) and internet access (per hr €3).

Tourist office (☎ 0832 24 80 92; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 24; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-9pm Mon-Sat)

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 brothers 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 facade, 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.

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** (☎ 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 facades, 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 ground level of Piazza Sant'Oronzio is the restored 2nd-century-AD **Roman amphitheatre** (admission €2; ☎ 10am-noon & 4-6pm), discovered in 1901 by construction workers. It was excavated in the 1930s to reveal a perfect horseshoe with seating for 15,000. Nearby

LECCE IN ...

One Day

Ponder the sumptuous facades of the *palazzi* (mansions), churches and not-so-plain old buildings on Via Libertini before heading for the Roman amphitheatre and a quick duck into fascinating **Museo Teatro Romano** (p724). Head for an outdoor cafe on Piazza Sant'Oronzio for a cappuccino. All that froth should be good preparation for the fanciful **Basilica di Santa Croce** (above); worth at least an hour of your time.

It's late morning by now, time to cool down with a Campari and ice across the way at the delightful art-deco bar at the **Patria Palace Hotel** (p725). Duly energised – and relaxed – stroll to the entertaining mix of shops on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, checking out the classy coffee-table books at **Liberrima** (above), before lunching on typical Pugliese fare at firmly traditional **Alle due Corti** (p725).

If you are a stride-out sort of person, you can walk off the pasta and beans by heading across town to the excellent **Museo Provinciale** (p724). If not, no worries, Lecce's baroque feast of *palazzi*-flanked streets (like Via Palmieri), **churches** (p724) and **cathedral** (above) will keep you simmering happily till dinner time. Crown your day in style with a meal at Picton (p725) housed in a wonderful old *palazzo*. Stroll back to your hotel via the Basilica, which is spectacularly lit up at night.

risers 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.

The small Roman theatre near here 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), with well-preserved russet-coloured Roman mosaics and frescoes.

CHURCHES

On Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the interior of 17th-century **Chiesa di Sant'Irene** contains a magnificent pair of mirror-image baroque altarpieces, facing each other across the transept. Opening hours are sporadic due to ongoing reformation. Other notable baroque churches include **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; 200m to its south, the **Chiesa di San Matteo** (Via dei Perroni 29; ☎ 9am–12.30pm Tue–Sun, 4–7.30pm daily); and the last work of Giuseppe Zimbalo, **Chiesa del Rosario** (Via Libertini). Instead of the intended dome roof, it ended up with a quick-fix wooden one following Zimbalo's death before the building was completed. The **Chiesa dei SS Nicolò e Cataldo** (Via San Nicola; ☎ 9am–noon, Sep–Apr, 5–7pm Jun–Aug), near Porta Napoli, was built by the Normans in 1180. It 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 **Castello di Carlo V** (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 trapezoidal structures. It's been used as a prison, a court, and military headquarters; now you can wander around the baronial spaces and visit the occasional art exhibition.

Activities

The countryside surrounding Lecce is perfect for cycling. **Cidovagando** (☎ 339 5967280; www.cidovagando.com; Via di Savoia 19, Mesagne; €120) organise guided full-day tours, including bike rental and helmets, with a choice of three to four itineraries. Each tour covers approximately 20km and they depart daily from Lecce (as well as Matera, Trani and Castellana Grotte).

Courses

Apulia Centre for Italian Language & Culture (☎ 0832 39 03 12; www.apuliadomus.com; Via Adriatica 10–12) 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; day/weeklong course €350/2145) Silvestro Silvestori's splendid cooking and wine school provides day or weeklong courses with tours, tastings and noteworthy lecturers.

Sleeping

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

Casa Elisabetta (☎ 0832 30 70 52; www.beb-lecce.com; Via Vignes 15; s/d €30/55) An elegant mansion that's centred on a graceful courtyard close to Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, this has nice, stately rooms, and is efficient and well run.

Azzurretta B&B (☎ 0832 24 22 11; www.bblecce.it; s €30–38, d €55–70) The friendly brother of Centro Storico (below) runs this shabbier version located within the same building. The parking (for both) is a major plus.

Centro Storico B&B (☎ 0832 24 27 27; www.bedandbreakfast.lecce.it; Via Vignes 2b; s €35–40, d €52–100; ☎ ☎) The rooms and suites in this charming 16th-century hideaway are stylish and colourful; think dark-pink walls in the suite. There is a rooftop terrace with sunloungers and views.

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; ☎ ☎) In the historic centre with tonnes 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 church.

our pick Suite 68 (☎ 0832 30 35 06; www.kalekora.it; Via Prato; r €80–120; ☎ ☎) This place has a North African feel with light streaming in the large bright rooms, painted in desert hues and decorated with vividly coloured rugs. Room

1 has a luxurious, sea-blue mosaic-tiled tub. Bikes available.

Palazzo Rollo (☎ 0832 30 71 52; www.palazzorollo.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 14; d €90-120, 4-person studio €100; (P) ♻️) 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. Downstairs, contemporary-chic studios open onto an ivy-hung courtyard. The rooftop garden has wonderful views.

Patria Palace Hotel (☎ 0832 24 51 11; www.patria-palacelecce.com; Piazzetta Riccardi 13; s €106-210, d €165-350; (P) ♻️) This sumptuous hotel has comfortable carpeted rooms with large mirrors, dark-wood furniture and wondrous murals. The location is wonderful, the bar gloriously art deco with a magnificent carved ceiling, and the shady roof terrace has views over the Basilica di Santa Croce.

Eating RESTAURANTS

Trattoria di Nonna Tetti (☎ 0832 24 60 36; Piazzetta Regina Maria 28; meals €15-20; ☺ lunch Tue-Sun dinner daily) A warmly inviting restaurant that is popular with all ages and budgets and serves a wide choice of traditional dishes. Try the most emblematic Pugliese dish here – braised wild chicory with a purée of boiled dried *fava* beans, along with very more-ish *contorni* (side dishes) like *patate casarecce* (home-made thinly sliced fries).

Alle due Corti (☎ 0832 24 22 23; www.alleduecorti.com; Corte dei Giugni 1; meals €15-20) For a taste of sunny Salentina, check out this no-frills, fiercely traditional restaurant. The seasonal menu is classic Pugliese, written in a dialect that even some Italians struggle with. Go for the real deal with a dish of *tajeddha* (layered potatoes, rice and mussels) or *ciceri e tria* (crisply fried pasta with chickpeas).

Mamma Lupa (☎ 340 7832765; Via Acaja 12; meals €15-20; ☺ Tue-Sun) Looking and tasting suitably rustic, this *osteria* serves proper peasant food – such as roast tomatoes, potatoes and artichokes, or horse meatballs – in snug surroundings with just a few tables surrounded by dark ochre walls.

Blu Notte (☎ 0832 30 42 86; Via Brancaccio 3; meals €30) Highly recommended by locals, this place is famed for its spectacular antipasti and wonderful seafood. 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 Idomeneo 14; meals €35; ☺ Tue-Sun) This backstreet restaurant has an

elegant dress-for-dinner feel. It is housed in an old *palazzo* with a cool barrel-vaulted interior and a refreshing internal garden, and the cuisine is traditional with a twist, including dishes such as *saltimbocca* (veal dish with sage and prosciutto meaning 'leap in the mouth').

Cucina Casareccia (☎ 0832 24 51 78; Viale Costadura 19; meals €40; ☺ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) Ring the bell to gain entry here. This place feels more like a private home, with its patterned cement floor tiles, desk piled high with papers, and charming owner Carmela Perrone. She'll whisk you through a dazzling array of Salentine dishes from the true *cucina povera* (cooking of the poor), including horsemeat done here in a *salsa piccante* (spicy sauce). Booking is a must.

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

CAFÉS & GELATERIE

Caffè Paisiello (☎ 0832 30 14 04; Via Palmieri 72; ☺ 7am-midnight) Popular with shoppers, this high-ceilinged cafe has excellent light snacks and a charming old-fashioned feel. There are some outside tables.

Il Caffè di Liberrima (☎ 0832 24 26 26; Corte dei Cicala; ☺ 8am-1am) Tables fill the little square next to the bookshop and *enoteca* (wine bar) 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; ☺ 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 Libertini 52; ☎ 8.30am-1.15pm daily, plus 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 €4.

Getting There & Away

BUS

STP (☎ 0832 35 91 42) runs buses to Brindisi (€3.30, 45 minutes, two daily) and throughout Puglia from the STP bus station.

FSE (☎ 0832 66 81 11) runs buses to Gallipoli (€3.50, one hour, four daily), Otranto (€2.90, one hour, two daily) and Brindisi (€3.30, 45 minutes, two daily), leaving from Via Torre del Parco.

TRAIN

There are frequent trains to Bari (from €13.80, 1½ to two hours), to Brindisi (from €8.10, 30 minutes), to Rome (from €62, 5½ to nine hours) and Bologna (from €66, 8½ to 9½ hours). For Naples (from €44, 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 the Salentine Peninsula'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 Galatina 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 is buried here) climbed Mount 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.

Soothe the soul further with a stay at nearby **Le Campine Eco-Resort** (☎ 0836 80 21 08; www.lecampineresort.com; Via Stazione 116; ☎ ☎) located around 7km east of here in tiny Zollino. As well as ayurvedic treatments, there are yoga courses with meals prepared according to macrobiotic and Slow Food precepts. Check the website for upcoming retreats and courses.

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

OTRANTO

pop 5500

Otranto overlooks a pretty harbour with brightly painted boats atop shimmering clear blue waters. In the historic centre, looming 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 vibrant towns. Much is closed in the low season.

Otranto was Italy's main port to the Orient for 1000 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 extraordinary Romanesque **cathedral** (Piazza Basilica; ☹ 8am-noon daily, 3-6pm 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. Don't forget to look up; the cathedral also boasts a beautiful wooden coffered ceiling.

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 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 and bones 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 well-restored and central Aragonese **castle** (Piazza Castello; adult/child €2/free; ☹ 10.30am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Sep-May, 10am-1pm & 4-11pm Jun, 10am-1pm & 4pm-midnight Jul & Aug), is a squat thick-walled fort, with the Charles V coat of arms above the entrance. There are some faded original murals and original canon balls on display, plus good views from the ramparts.

There are some great beaches north of Otranto. Head out of town on the coastal road for 7.1km until you reach the Lido dei Pini exit. Follow the signs for **Spiaggia Azzurra**; a beautiful beach with velvet-soft sand. You can rent sunbeds (per day €4) just west of here at Lido Sirena. There are a handful of bars and restaurants along this strip of coast.

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

Brush-up your Italian at **Otranto nel Mondo** (☎ 0836 80 20 03; www.otrantonelmundo.com) over the summer. The courses involve lots of extracurricular high jinks 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 p713 for suggested websites).

Balconcino d'Oriente (☎ 0836 80 15 29; www.balconcinodoriente.com; Via San Francesco da Paola 71; s €25-55, d €50-100; (P) ☹) A friendly B&B in a great location and offering a more imaginative breakfast than most. There is an African-cum-Middle-Eastern theme throughout with colourful bed linens, African prints, Moroccan lamps and orange colour washes on the walls.

Palazzo de Mori (☎ 0836 80 10 88; www.palazzodemori.it; Bastione dei Pelasgi; s €85-100, d €100-150; ☹ Jan-Oct; ☹ ☹) This charming boutique hotel is located 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.

Palazzo Papaleo (☎ 0836 80 21 08; www.hotelpalazzopapaleo.com; Via Rondachi 1; s €140-250, d €150-280; (P) ☹ ☹) Located next to the cathedral, this sumptuous hotel was the first to earn the EU Eco-label in Puglia. (For more information about the criteria, check the www.eco-label.com website). Aside from its ecological convictions, the hotel has magnificent rooms with original frescoes, exquisitely carved antique furniture and walls washed in soft greys, ochres and yellows. Soak in the panoramic views while enjoying the rooftop jacuzzi.

Eating & Drinking

La Botte (☎ 0836 80 42 93; Via del Porto; pizzas from €4) Has a large wooden terrace and reliably good pizzas. It is located just outside the touristy pedestrian loop on the road leading from the port.

Laltro Baffo (☎ 0836 60 16 36; Cenoblio Basiliano 23; meals €25) A new kid on the block with a more fashionable look than some of the old timers.

Readers have recommended the excellent seafood; go for the daily fish option prepared with pasta.

Da Sergio (☎ 0836 80 14 08; Corso Garibaldi 9; meals €36) Smart, chic and favoured by locals, this is Otranto's most famous fish restaurant, situated in an ace position for people-watching, smack bang in the centre of the touristy *corso*. There is no menu, instead you will be provided a choice of the day's catch which is then charged by weight.

You can drink at bars along the city wall, overlooking the sea. A popular bar serving *aperitivi* and snacks is **Il Covo dei Mori** (☎ 0836 80 20 33; Via Leon Dari).

Shopping

Anima Mundi (☎ 0836 195 52 62; Vicolo Majorano 8) sells stunning photography (and other) books about the region, as well as local music. Massimiliano Morabito is a good bet if you are looking for traditional *tarantella* folk music – check him out on YouTube.

Getting There & Away

Otranto can be reached from Lecce by FSE train (€2.90, one hour), or by bus (€4, 80 minutes).

Marozzi (☎ 0836 80 15 78) has a daily bus service to Rome (€46, 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 abound along the coast – try **Camping Maggiano** (☎ 0832 34 06 86; www.campingportomiggiano.it; camping 2 people, car & tent €23; ☹ Jun-Sep), 16km south of Otranto. It's on the clifftop and is olive-tree shaded, with steps down to the beach.

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's a very genuine place with a gritty individuality and still feels like a working Italian town, unlike more seasonal coastal places. In the summer, bars and restaurants make the most of the island's ramparts, looking out to sea.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 0833 26 25 29; Via Antonietta de Pace 86; ☹ 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat) is located near the cathedral in 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 lively **fish market**.

In the centre, on the highest point of the island, is the 17th-century baroque **Cattedrale di Sant'Agata** (Via Antonietta de Pace; ☹ hours vary), lined with paintings by local artists. Zimbalo, who imprinted Lecce with his crazy baroque styles (p724), also worked on the facade. Nearby, and across from the tourist office, 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** (☎ 0833 26 42 24; Via Antonietta de Pace 108; adult/child €1/free; ☹ 10am-1pm & 6-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat), 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

La Casa del Mare (☎ 328 179136; www.lacasadelmare.com; Piazza de Amici 14; d €60-110; ☹) This butter-coloured 16th-century building on a little square in the town centre overlooking a statue of a cheery Padre Pio (p703) is a good choice, with plain but bright white-walled rooms. Pre-

book or turn up between 3pm and 6pm when owners Laura and Federico are there.

our pick Insula (☎ 0833 20 14 13; Via de Pace 56; www.bbinsulagallipoli.it; d €70-130; ☼) A magnificent 15th-century building houses this memorable B&B. The rooms are all different but share the same princely atmosphere with exquisite antiques, vaulted high ceilings and cool pastel paintwork. The tranquil terrace, flanked by ancient walls with original stone work, has a tangible historic feel.

Masseria Don Cirillo (☎ 0833 30 35 06; www.masseria doncirillo.it; Torre San Giovanni, Ugento; r €150-230; ☼ Apr-Oct; ☼ ☼ ☼) Around 15km from Gallipoli, this is a fabulous special-occasion *masseria*. Its furnishings are a chic mix of modern and rustic and its rooms, arched in pale stone, are surrounded by greenery. Traditional *gozzo* (wooden boat) and bikes are available.

Relais Corte Palmieri (☎ 0833 26 25 63; www.relais cortepalmieri.it; Corte Palmieri 3; s €90-170, d €120-200; ☼ ☼) A cream-coloured, well-kept hotel. It's run by the same management as Palazzo del Corso (just outside the old town) and the equally good Palazzo Mosco Inn B&B (see the website for info) and has elegant rooms accentuated by traditional painted furniture, wrought-iron bedheads and crisp red-and-white linen.

Il Giardino Segreto (☎ 0833 26 44 30; Via de Pace 116; meals €15) 'The Secret Garden' is just that, with a secluded courtyard out back and tables set around a lemon tree centrepiece. Dishes should suit the fussiest of diners with salads, bruschetta, pasta, meat and fish dishes and a reasonable €15 daily menu.

La Puritate (☎ 0833 26 42 05; Via S Elia 18; meals €45; ☼ Thu-Tue) A great place for fish in the old town with picture windows and sea views. 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 (€3.50, 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 – Taranto's distinctive characteristics protect an edgy, but characterful heart and possibly the best seafood in southern Italy.

According to legend, the city was founded by Taras, son of Poseidon who arrived on the back of a dolphin (as you do). Less romantically, the city was actually founded in the 7th century BC by exiles from Sparta – although the name Taras stuck – to become 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.

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).

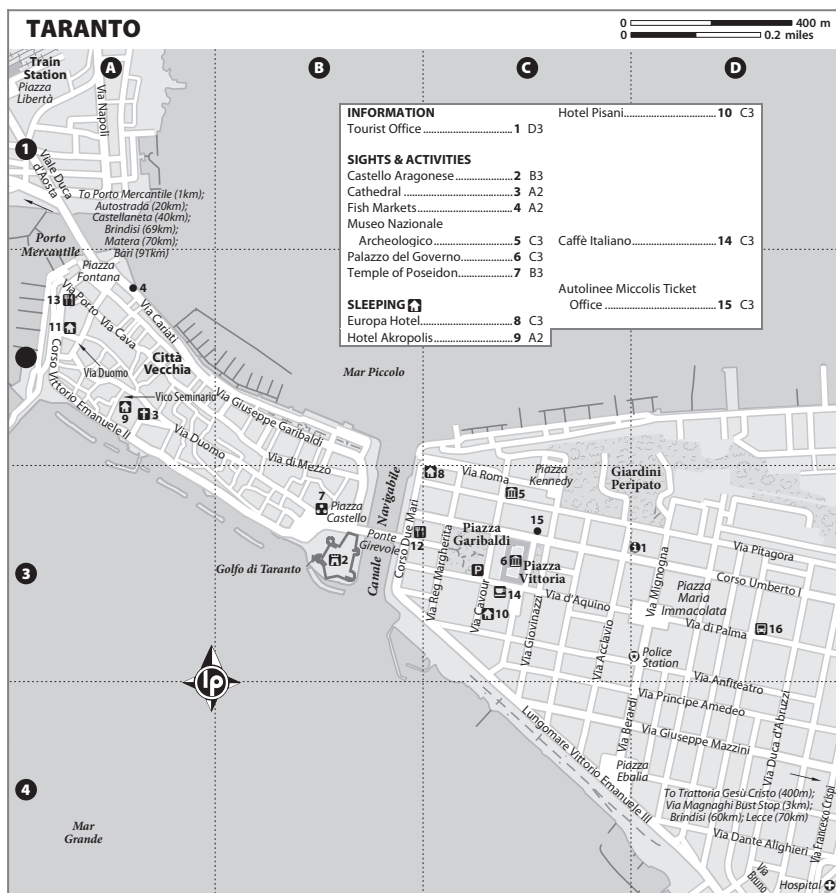
Sights

CITTÀ VECCHIA

Although Taranto's medieval town centre is rundown, it is gradually being tastefully renovated and has a gritty and vibrant atmosphere. It is 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 Mon-Fri) is an impressive structure, currently occupied by the Italian navy. Opposite, you will see the remaining columns of Taranto's ancient **Temple of Poseidon** (Piazza Castello).

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 di San Cataldo is a baroque riot of frescoes and polychrome marble inlay.

Awash with the smell of the sea, Taranto's real essence lies in the **fish markets** on Via Cariatì.



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**.

The superb **Museo Nazionale Archeologico** (☎ 099 453 21 12; www.museotaranto.it, in Italian; Via Cavour 10; adult/child €5/free; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm) is one of Italy's most important archaeological museums, and houses, among other ancient artefacts, the largest collection of Greek terracotta figures in the world. Also exhibited in this brand-new museum space are fine collections of 1st-century-BC glassware, classic black-and-red Attic vases and stunning jewellery such as a 4th-century-BC bronze and terracotta crown.

Activities

The closest beach is the thoroughly acceptable Lido Bruno just southeast of the city. They improve the further you get from the city. The stretch between Torre Ovo and Torretta is lovely, with beaches backed by low dunes and plenty of off-road parking.

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

Ostello della Gioventù (☎ 099 476 00 33; www.ostello.lalocanda.it; Vico Civitanova; dm €20, s/d €30/50; (P)) Spartan clean and sufficiently comfortable rooms in a great location, just off Piazza Fontana. Meals available (€12).

Hotel Pisani (☎ 099 453 40 87; Via Cavour 43; s/d €30/50) Tucked off the main square in the new town (Garibaldi), the dated rooms and slimline bathrooms are fairly forgettable. However they are freshly mopped and sufficiently comfortable providing you have no allusions to grandeur.

Europa Hotel (☎ 099 452 59 94; www.hotel.europaonline.it; Via Roma 2; s/d €80/105; (X)) On the seafront next to the swing bridge, this ship-shape, if bland, option overlooks the old town. A hotel since 1888, it has an elegant 19th-century facade concealing modern, business-oriented rooms.

Hotel Akropolis (☎ 099 470 41 10; www.hotel.akropolis.it; Vico I Seminario 3; s €105-125, d €145-175; (X) (P)) A converted medieval *palazzo* in the crumbling old town, this luxurious hotel sits grandly beside the cathedral. There are 13 stylish cream-and-white rooms, original majolica-tiled floors, and tremendous views from the rooftop 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, a classy cafe with excellent *focaccia*, coffee and ice cream, and outside seating on the pedestrianised street.

Balzi Blu (☎ 347 4653211; Corso Due Mari 22; pizza from €4.50, meals €15; ☎ Tue-Sun) A local favourite on the *corso*, serving some 300 different wines, plus excellent pizza with an exceptional crust made from 13 different types of flour. There are great views of the old city from the summer terrace.

Trattoria da Ugo (☎ 329 1415850; cnr of Via Cataldo de Tulio & Via Fontana; meals €18-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) A deeply traditional Tarantine trattoria with a seafood-only menu, including grilled mussels, octopus with lemon and olive oil and fried prawns and squid. Superb value.

Trattoria Gesù Cristo (☎ 099 477 72 53; Via Battisti 8; meals €30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun)

Atmospheric family-friendly place southeast of the centre with a menu of seafood that really is the catch of the day (the owners run the fish shop next door). Go for a grilling with the simplest dish on the menu: freshly grilled fish with lemon.

Getting There & Around

BUS

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 (€5.30, 1¼ to 2¼ hours, frequent). Infrequent **SITA** (☎ 899 32 52 04; www.sitabus.it, in Italian) buses leave from Porto Mercantile for Matera (€4.60, 1¼ hr, one daily). **STP** (☎ 0832 22 44 11) and FSE buses go to Lecce (€7, two hours, five daily).

Marozzi (☎ 080 579 90 111) has express services serving Rome's Stazione Tiburtina (€41.50, six hours, four daily). **Autolinee Miccolis** (☎ 099 470 44 51) serves Naples (€18, four hours, three daily) via Potenza (€9.50, two hours).

The bus **ticket office** (☎ 7am-1.30pm & 3-9.30pm) is at Porto Mercantile.

TRAIN

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 (€5.10, 1¼ hours, frequent) and Bari (€7.40, 2½ hours, frequent), as well as Rome (from €41, 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 – its title suggesting 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* (former cave dwellings) 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 and 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, 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, Basilikōs (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, 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. 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.

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 a rare 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 Crotona (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 slip road for Taranto onto the SS106.

SITA (☎ 0835 38 50 07; www.sitabus.it, in Italian) buses run from Matera (€3, one hour, up to 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 *The Godfather III*. Coppola is converting the 19th-century Palazzo Margherita into a glamorous 12-room boutique hotel, as well as developing an experimental centre for visual and musical arts in nearby Metaponto (left), along with his nephew Nicolas Cage.

SITA buses run between Bernalda and Matera.

Policoro

pop 15,422

If you get as far as Metaponto, consider continuing about 21km southwest to Policoro, originally the Greek settlement of Eracleia. 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 them to perilous use.

SITA buses run here from Metaponto (left).

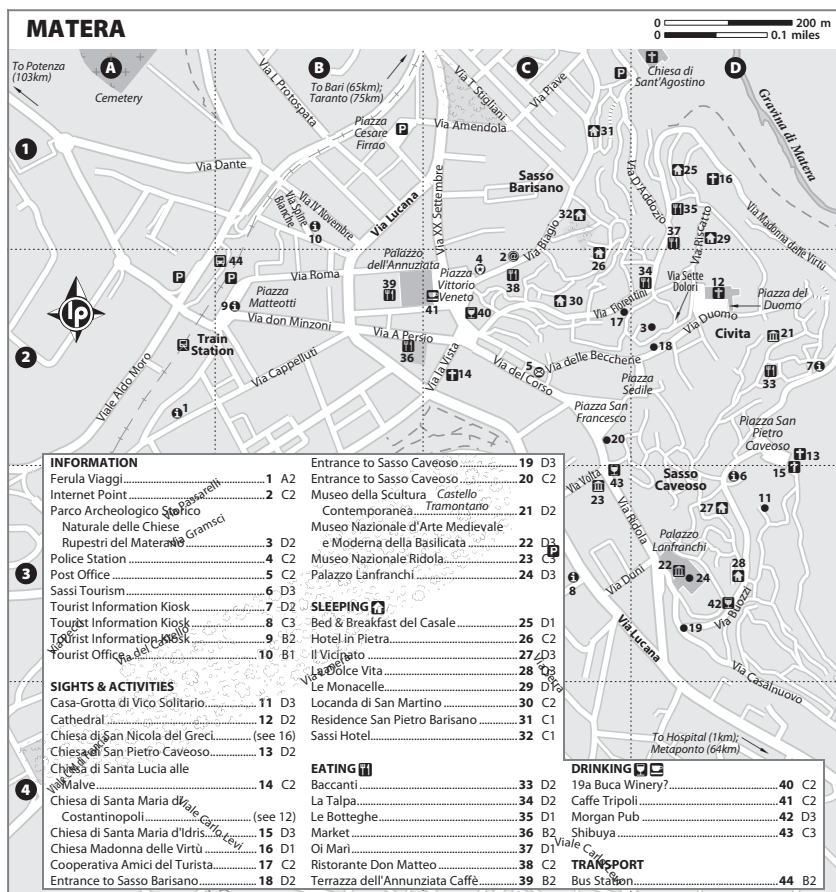
MATERA

pop 59,144 / elev 405m

Approach Matera from virtually any direction and your first glimpse of its famous *sassi* (stone houses carved out of the caves and cliffs) is sure to be etched in your memory forever. Haunting and beautiful, though not in a snowdrops-in-spring kind of way, this great monochrome slab of mountainside is pockmarked with caves; a harrowing reminder of former scenes of abject poverty. 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, particularly post-2004 when Mel Gibson's controversial blockbuster *The Passion of Christ* was filmed here.

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. It remains one of modern Italy's great scandals.

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 surrounding Parco della

Murgia Materana, showing some routes around the gorge.

Information

Basilicata Turistica (www.aptbasilicata.it)

Ferula Viaggi (☎ 0835 33 65 72; www.matera-turismo.it; Via Cappelluti 34; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat) Excellent tourist cooperative and travel agency dedicated to promoting Basilicata. It runs great tours (see p737 for more details), and tours in the Pollino (see p742).

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

Internet point (☎ 0835 34 41 66; Via San Biagio 9; per hr €3; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-8.30pm)

Parco Archeologico Storico Naturale delle Chiese Rupestri del Materano (☎ 0835 33 61 66; www.parcomurgia.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 Buozzi 141) Tourism organisation offering tours around Matera as well as entry into sites (see below).

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

Tourist information kiosk (☎ 0835 24 12 60;

☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 4-7pm summer) Branches on Via Madonna delle Virtù, Piazza Matteotti and Via Lucana. Run by the Comune di Matera, offers guided tours and tickets for entry to churches.

Tourist office (☎ 0835 33 19 83; www.materaturismo.it; Via Spine Bianche; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Can provide guides.

Sights & Activities

THE SASSI

Matera's many belvederes, such as from Piazza Vittorio Veneto, Palazzo Lanfranchi or the cathedral, present a town and landscape unlike anywhere else. The deep limestone ravines are pitted with caves, dating as far back as the 8th century BC.

There are two *sasso* districts: the more restored, northwest-facing **Sasso Barisano** and the more impoverished, northeast-facing **Sasso Caveoso**. Both are extraordinary, riddled with serpentine alleyways and staircases, and dotted with frescoed *chiese rupestri* (cave churches) created between the 8th and 13th centuries. Matera contains some 3000 habitable caves.

You can easily navigate the *sassi* alone, but a qualified guide has benefits. They can take you to the most interesting sites, offer lots of

background and unlock many of the more interesting cave churches. For details see left.

Highlights in the Sasso Barisano include the magnificent monastic complex of **Madonna delle Virtù** and **San Nicola del Greci** (Via Madonna delle Virtù; ☎ 10am-7pm Sat & Sun), composed of dozens of caves spread over two floors. The church of the Chiesa Madonna delle Virtù was built in the 10th or 11th century and restored in the 17th century. Above it, the simple church of Chiesa di San Nicola del Greci is rich in frescoes. The complex was used in 1213 by Benedictine monks of Palestinian origin. From late June to October a modern art exhibition is showcased in Madonna delle Virtù.

Sasso Caveoso includes the highlights of **Chiesa di San Pietro Caveoso** (Piazza San Pietro Caveoso) and the richly frescoed rock churches **Santa Maria d'Ildris** (Piazza San Pietro Caveoso) and **Santa Lucia alle Malve** (Via la Vista). A couple of *sassi* have been refurbished as they were when inhabited. The most interesting is the **Casa-Grotta di Vico Solitario** (admission €1.50), off Via Buozzi. It has an engaging 10-minute multilingual audio explanation describing the gruelling living conditions of a typical cave house, which included a manure room and a cordoned-off area for a donkey. It's little wonder that the infant mortality rate was 50%.

Sassi Tourism (see left) operates entry into five churches, including Santa Maria d'Ildris, 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.musma.it; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-8pm Apr-Oct, 10am-2pm Nov-Mar; adult/concession €5/3.50) is a fabulous contemporary sculpture museum, housed in Palazzo Pomarici. Exhibits are artfully displayed in atmospherically lit caves, including contemporary representations of space, thought-provoking interpretations of Adam

and 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 Lynn Chadwick, one of the leading British sculptors after World War II.

TOWN CENTRE

The focus of the town is Piazza Vittorio Veneto, an excellent, bustling meeting point for an evening *Passeggiata* (stroll). 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 renovation) makes the neobaroque excess within all the more of a surprise: ornate capitals, sumptuous chapels and tons of gild-

ing. 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; adult/concession €2.50/1.25; ☎ 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; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 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;

MATERA IN ...

One Day

Aim for one of the belvederes for a photo-snap of the *sassi* (former cave dwellings) before any heat haze sets in. Precede any further *sassi* exploration by heading for the contrasting elegant centre of town for a cappuccino at **Caffè Tripoli** (Piazza Vittorio Veneto 17). Stroll around **Piazza Vittorio Veneto** (Map p734), admiring the opulent exteriors of the *palazzi* (mansions) and churches before returning to the *sassi* flipside. Approach Sasso Barisano via Via Fiorentini and take the steep steps up to Piazza del Duomo; the highest point in town where you can fill another flash card with vista-view photos before exploring the **cathedral** (above) and surrounding 15th-century perfectly preserved streets. Follow the map up to the monastic complex of **Madonna delle Virtù and San Nicola dei Greci** (p735) with its original frescoes. Stop for lunch at **Le Botteghe** (p738) and, after hotel siesta time, head for Sasso Caveoso's rock churches of **San Pietro Caveoso** (p735), **Santa Maria d'Idris** (p735) and **Santa Lucia alle Malve** (p735). Early evening, enjoy a sassy cocktail at the **Morgan Pub** (p738) before completing the day's loop by returning to Piazza Vittorio Veneto for dinner at **Ristorante Don Matteo** (p738), just off the square.

Two Days

A second day could be devoted to Matera's excellent museums. In the heart of Sasso Caveoso the **Casa-Grotte di Vico Solitario** (p735) may sound a tad contrived but really *does* provide a vivid picture of former living conditions here. Allow plenty of time for a visit to the **Museo della Scultura Contemporanea** (MUSMA; p735) with its atmospheric cave setting. Next, take a giant step into the past at the **Museo Nazionale Ridola** (above) with its prehistoric and Bronze Age exhibits. Finally, art enthusiasts should not miss the **Museo Nazionale d'Arte Moderna** (above) within the Museo di Arte Medievale e Moderna della Basilicata, which highlights the bold and stylistic work of local Renaissance man, Carlo Levi.

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; p735) out on the Murgia plateau, from a couple of hours' walk to weeklong trips. For example, the two-day tour takes in the rock churches and visits fortified farms and frescoed cave chapels (€162), while a weeklong 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.

Via Fiorentini 28-30) or **Ferula Viaggi** (p735) 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 (above). The people that run MUSMA (see p735) run tours to a spectacular crypt chapel.

A reliable English-speaking guide is American **Amy Weideman** (☎ 339 282 3618). 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*.

La Dolce Vita (☎ 0835 31 03 24; Rione Malve 51; s €40-60, d €50-80) Owner Vincenzo Altieri (ex-manager of Hotel Sant'Angelo) has created a delightful ecofriendly B&B in Sasso Caveoso, with solar panels and recycled rain water for plumbing. The rooms are cool and simply furnished with cream paintwork, dark-wood furniture and the occasional religious picture.

Bed & Breakfast del Casale (☎ 0835 33 73 04; Via Casale 43; s €40-60, d €60-80) The spacious and *sassi*-central apartment here burrows deep into the cave. Located in Sasso Barisano, the decor is dated, but very comfortable, and there is a kitchenette and terrace.

Il Vicinato (☎ 0835 31 26 72; www.ilvicinato.com; Piazzetta San Pietro Caveoso 7; s/d 45/70) Enjoys a great, easy-to-find location, and rooms are 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.

Le Monacelle (☎ 0835 34 40 97; www.lemonacelle.it; Via Riscatto 9; dm €18, s/d €55/86; ☎ ☎) Near the duomo, and next to the delightful small Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi chapel, this 16th-century building offers simple dorms and plainly furnished rooms, as well as atmospheric cobbled terraces with stunning *sassi* views.

Sassi Hotel (☎ 0835 33 10 09; www.hotelsassi.it; Via San Giovanni Vecchio 89; s/d incl breakfast €70/90; ☎ ☎) In an 18th-century rambling edifice in Sasso Barisano, this has graceful rooms – some in caves, some not – with cathedral views from the balconies and the added plus of fridges in the rooms.

Residence San Pietro Barisano (☎ 0835 34 61 91; www.residencesanpietrobarisano.it; Rione San Biagio €52/56; s/d from €60/80; ☎ ☎) The five apartments here are all light pine and sleek, ergonomic furnishings, set against the soothing natural cave interiors. The restaurant is similarly elegant and excellent (meals €35).

Locanda di San Martino (☎ 0835 25 66 00; www.locandadisanimartino.it; Via Fiorentini 71; s/d €87/102; ☎ ☎ ☎) A sumptuous hotel where you can swim in a cave without dipping your toe in the sea; a subterranean full-length swimming pool is due to open here in 2010. The cave accommodation, complete with niches and rustic brick floors, is set around a warren of cobbled paths and courtyards.

ourpick Hotel in Pietra (☎ 0835 31 40 10; www.hotelinpietra.it; Via San Giovanni Vecchio 22; Barisano; s €70, d €110-150; ☎ ☎ ☎) This boutique hotel opened in 2008 and is simply breathtaking. The lobby is set in a former 13th-century chapel complete with soaring arches, while the eight rooms combine soft golden stone with the natural cave interior. Furnishings are Zen-style with

low beds, while the bathrooms are super-stylish and include vast sunken tubs.

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, quiet and panoramic views.

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

our pick La Talpa (☎ 0835 33 50 86; Via Fiorentini 168; meals €15; ☎ Wed-Mon) Down the road from Oi Mari, the cavernous dining rooms are moodily lit and atmospheric. A popular spot for romancing couples, the standard is very high, both for pizzas and specialties like *capunti con purea di cicerchié, funghi e rucola* (pasta with a bean, mushrooms and rocket sauce).

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 arched whitewashed rooms. Try delicious local specialties like *fusilli mollica e crusco* (pasta and fried bread with local sweet peppers) followed by the *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 vaulted 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 dishes.

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 Persio) just south of Piazza Vittorio Veneto.

Drinking

19a Buca Winery? (☎ 0835 33 35 92; 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-cafe-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).

Morgan Pub (☎ 0835 31 22 33; Via Buozzi 2; ☎ Wed-Mon) A hip and cavernous cellar pub with outside tables in the summer.

Shibuya (☎ 0835 33 74 09; Vico Purgatorio 12; ☎ 9am-3am Tue-Sun) This cool little cafe 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.

Caffè Tripoli (Piazza Vittorio Veneto) Enjoy some of the best pastries and cappuccino in town, served by bow-tied waiters in this prime people-watching spot.

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 (€4.60, two hours, one daily) and Metaponto (€3.20, one hour, up to five daily) and many small towns in the province. **Grassani** (☎ 0835 72 14 43) serves Potenza (€5.30, two daily). Buy tickets from newspaper kiosks on Piazza Matteotti.

Marozzi (☎ 06 225 21 47; www.marozzivi.it) runs three 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 33 28 61; www.fal-srl.it) runs regular trains (€4.35, 1½ hours, 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.

VENOSA

pop 12,147

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 **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 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, 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 north-eastern 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 century using materials from the neighbouring Roman amphitheatre. A little way south are some Jewish and Christian catacombs.

Hotel Orazio (☎ 0972 3 11 35; Vittorio Emanuele II 142; s/d €45/65) 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 (☎ 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 bus Mondays to Saturdays from Potenza (€6.20, 1½ hours).

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 straddles 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 and 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** (☎ 097 12 55 91; www.alconvento.eu; Largo San Michele Arcangelo 21; s €50-55, d €80-90; ☎ ☎) 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 (☎ 097 15 69 00; Viale Marconi 233; meals €40; ☎ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat Sep-Jul) is a fantastic restaurant serving traditional dishes prepared with flair and imagination with an emphasis on fish. 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** (☎ 097 15 46 73) buses serve cities including Rome (€23, 4½ hours, one daily) and Naples (€8.59, two hours, three daily), via Salerno (€7, 1½ hours).

There are regular train services from Potenza Inferiore to Taranto (€8.50, two hours), Salerno (€6.30, two hours) and Foggia (€6.40, 2¼ hours). For Bari (€9.10, four hours, four daily), use the **Ferrovie Appulo-Lucane** (☎ 0971 41 15 61) at Potenza Superiore station.

APPENNINO LUCANO

The Appennino Lucano (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 he 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; albrfrantoio@tiscalinet.it; Via M Torraca 15/17; s/d €28/40, d with full board €47). 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, simple whitewashed rooms (single/double €50/80) with lots of dark wood and fabulous views.

Aliano is accessible by SITA bus (p738) from Matera, with a change in Pisticci Scalo. You'll need your own vehicle to visit Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa.

TYRRHENIAN COAST

Resembling a mini-Amalfi, Basilicata's Tyrrrhenian 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 is a charming, if confusing, place at first, being comprised of several distinct localities ranging from a medieval village to a stylish harbour. The setting is lush and dramatic, with a coastal road (narrower even than the infamous Amalfi Coast road!) that dips and winds past the cliffs and pocket-size beaches that line the sparkling Golfo di Policastro.

OUR TOP FIVE RESTAURANTS IN BASILICATA

- La Talpa (p738), Matera
- Da Peppe (p742), Rotunda
- Al Frantoio (p739), Venosa
- Lanterna Rossa (opposite), Maratea
- Baccanti (p738), Matera

Studded with elegant hotels, Maratea's attraction is no secret and you can expect tailback traffic and fully booked hotels in July and August. Conversely, many hotels and restaurants close from October to March.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Your first port of call should be the pretty **Porto di Maratea**, a harbour where sleek yachts and bright-blue fishing boats bob in the water, overlooked by bars and restaurants. 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 **Acquafredda di Maratea** and **Fiumicello**, with its small 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 hrs Sep-Jun) in Fiumicello.

Centro Sub Maratea (☎ 0973 87 00 13; www.cs.maratea.it; Via Santa Caterina 28, Maratea) offers diving courses and boat tours that include visits to surrounding grottoes and coves. Also rents boats.

A worthwhile day trip via car is to pretty **Rivello** (elevation 479m). Perched on a ridge, framed by the southern Apennines, these days it is a centre for arts and crafts and has long been known for its exquisite working of gold and copper. It is also a gastronomic centre for the rapidly expanding Slow Food Movement.

Rivella's interesting Byzantine history is evident in the tiny tiled cupolas and frescoes of its gorgeous churches.

SLEEPING

Maratea is one of the most sophisticated resorts in the south, with accommodation to match.

B&B Nefer (☎ 0973 87 18 28; www.bbnefer.it; Via Cersuta; s €50-60, d €65-80; (P)) A B&B set in a small hamlet (Via Cersuta), 5km northwest of Maratea. It has three rooms decorated in sea greens and blues that open onto a lush green lawn complete with deckchairs for contemplating the distant sea view. 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.villa.cheta.it; Via Timpone 46; d €90-125; ☎ May-Oct; (P) (S)) A charming art-nouveau villa at the entrance to 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.locandamonache.com; Via Mazzei 4; r €120-230; ☎ May-Oct; (P) (S) (A)) Overlooking the medieval *borgo*, this exclusive hotel is in a converted 18th-century convent with a suitably lofty setting. It's a hotchpotch of vaulted corridors, terraces and gardens fringed with bougainvillea and lemon trees. The rooms are elegantly decorated in pastel shades, while the Sacello restaurant prepares delicate dishes drawing on the regional flavours of Lucania.

EATING

Litrico's (☎ 0973 87 70 05; Via San Venere; meals €18) A sprawling restaurant and terrace on the approach to Fiumicello's modest commercial strip. The menu holds few surprises but dishes won't disappoint. You can work off the carbs with a game of tennis – the owners run the public tennis court next door.

Lanterna Rossa (☎ 0973 87 63 52; Maratea Porto; meals €30; ☎ Apr-Sep) Head for the terrace overlooking the port to dine on exquisite seafood dishes, like marinated anchovies with chilli red peppers, or a sumptuous antipasto. Cheese lovers shouldn't miss the cream of ricotta and Battipaglia cheese with Calabrian caviar.

Taverna Rovita (☎ 0973 87 65 88; Via Rovita 13; meals €35; ☎ 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 specialties involving stuffed peppers, game birds, local salami and fine seafood.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

SITA (☎ 0971 50 68 11; www.sitabus.it, in Italian) operates a comprehensive network of routes including up the coast to Sapri in Campania (€1.60, 50 minutes, six daily). Local buses (€1) 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), straddles Basilicata and Calabria, (see the beginning of the Calabria section, p743) for the park area that falls under that region). It acts like a rocky curtain separating the region from the rest of Italy and has the richest repository of flora and fauna in the south, covering 1960 sq km.

The park's most spectacular areas are the central Monte Pollino (2248m), 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**.

Orientation & Information

The park's main centre is **Rotonda** (elevation 626m), which is accessible from the A3 and SS19 and is home to 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). **Pollino Info Point** (www.ferulaviaggi.it) is run by Ferula Viaggi (p735) 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 Escursionistica 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) online at www.ecommerce.escursionista.it.

Sleeping & Eating

Asklepios (☎ 0973 66 92 90/347 2631462; 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 similar *agriturismi* (farm-stay accommodation) *Agriturismo Civarra* (☎ 0973 669152) and *Agriturismo il Calvino* (☎ 0973 661688), both of which have great views. You can arrange trekking or rafting from all three places and they offer special activity packages. For more information see the Asklepios website.

Picchio Nero (☎ 0973 9 31 70; www.picchionero.com; Via Mulino 1; s/d incl breakfast €60/73; (P)) The chalet-style Picchio Nero in Terranova di Pollino, with its Austrian-style wooden balconies and

recommended restaurant (meals €35), is the most popular hotel for hikers. It's family-run, cosy and friendly, has a small garden and can help arrange excursions.

Luna Rossa (☎ 0973 9 32 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 with breathtaking views.

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 town-house near the main piazza.

Getting There & Away

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

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 Crotone 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 racked by malaria.

A by-product 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.

Reggio di Calabria airport (Ravagnese; ☎ 0965 64 05 17) is located around 5km south of town, and mainly handles national flights.

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 p741.

You can order detailed maps online from www.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.laoraft.com; Via Lauro 10/12) in Scalea and **Adventure 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 Leticelle 55; s/d €90/120; ☎ ☹ ☹) 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 3236914; www.colloredo.it; Fratelli Coscia; s/d €28/56), near Morano Calabro, is in a remote rural setting, gorgeous amid rolling hills. Rooms are comfortable, old-fashioned country-style with

CALABRIA

0 40 km
0 20 miles



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 summer resorts has taken its toll here, and certain stretches are blighted by shoddy hotels and soulless 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 p753.

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 Cirella and Diamante. 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 (€5.10, 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 fashionable 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 contemporary local and foreign artists have painted on

the facades of the old buildings. For the best seafood restaurants head for the seafront at Spiaggia Piccola.

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 stunning 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.

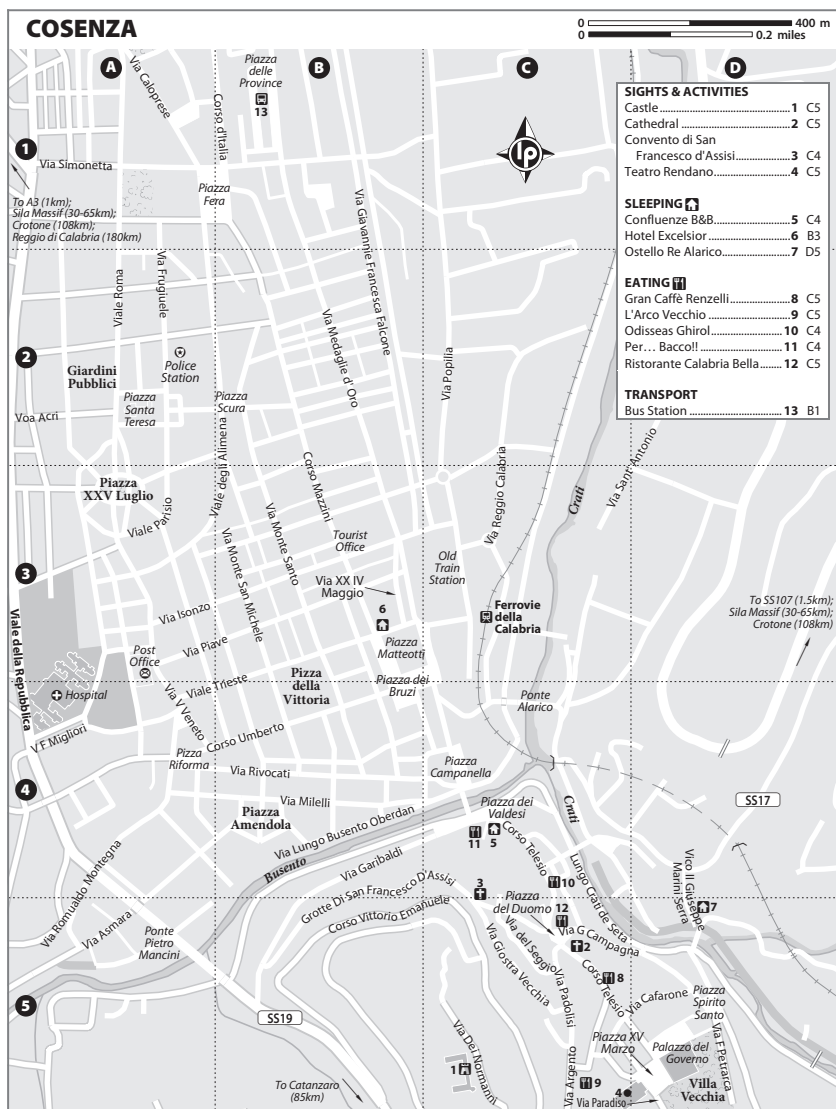
Watched over by a crumbling castle, the **Santuario di San Francesco di Paola** (☎ 0982 58 25 18; admission free; ☹ 6am-1pm & 2-6pm) is a curious, empty cave with tremendous significance to the devout. The saint lived and died in Paola in the 15th century and the sanctuary that he and his followers carved 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, with an evocative medieval quarter and a surprising lack of camera-touting tourists.

Cosenza is home to Calabria's most important university, and its theatre hosts an excellent opera season. It's also the gate-

way 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 to see here, but the medieval centre is very atmospheric. Head up the winding, charmingly dilapidated Corso Telesio which has a raw Neapolitan feel to it and is lined with ancient hung-with-washing tenements, antiquated shopfronts and a worrying number of funeral parlours. At the top, the 12th-century **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ hrs vary) has been 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 the lovely **Villa Vecchia** park with lofty mature trees providing welcome shade.

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 good budget options.

ostello Re Alarico (☎ 0984 79 25 70; Vico II 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; Vico IV Santa Lucia 48; s €25-35, d with/without bathroom €70/50) Tucked away in the shabby backstreets behind Piazza dei Valdesi, this small, popular B&B 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 €50/70; ☎) 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 cafe behind the duomo has been run by the same family since 1801 when the founder arrived from Naples and began baking gooey cakes and desserts (cakes start at around €1.20). Sink your teeth into *torroncino torrefacto* – a confection of sugar, spices and hazelnuts – in elegant 19th-century surroundings.

Odiseas Ghirol (☎ 348 4016821; Corso Telesio 78; meals €12) There's not much elbow room at this pint-sized Greek restaurant with just a few scrubbed pine tables. But this is the place to come if you yearn for something different from traditional Calabrian cuisine, with authentic Greek dishes on the menu like mousaka and souvlaki.

Ristorante Calabria Bella (☎ 0984 79 35 31; Piazza del Duomo; meals €25; ☎ noon-3pm & 7pm-midnight) This is one of the best choices in the old town, located beside the cathedral. Join the local businessmen and ladies-who-lunch tucking into Calabrian cuisine, such as *grigliata mista di carne* (mixed grilled meats), in a series of wood-beamed rooms.

Per... Bacco!! (☎ 0984 79 55 69; Piazza dei Valdesi; meals €25) This smart yet informal restaurant has windows onto the square. Inside are exposed stone walls, vines and heavy beams. The reassuringly brief menu includes a generous antipasto (€8) and various *baccalà* (cod) dishes.

L'Arco Vecchio (☎ 0984 7 25 64; Piazza Archi di Giaccio 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, pretty paintings and a glossy baby grand, and serves tasty, traditional dishes like *lagane e ceci* (pasta with chickpeas, garlic and oil).

Getting There & Around

The main bus station is northeast of Piazza Fera. Services leave for Catanzaro (€4.60, 1¼ 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 covering 130 sq km: 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 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 Silano. There is also plenty of wildlife here, including the light-grey Apennine wolf, a protected species.

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. A useful internet resource is www.portalesila.it. The people who run B&B Calabria (opposite) are extremely knowledgeable and helpful.

For maps, try www.e-commerce.escursionista.it, where you can buy maps of Sila Grande 1:50,000 (€6.50) and Sila Piccola (€9.50).

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 6988835/86436 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 below).

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.

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.sculatappeti.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 superb B&B, and from **Sersale** (739m) further south, you can go trekking with Valli Cupe (see above) and see the Campanero, Aquila and Inferno waterfalls.

Sleeping

It's wonderful to stay around the pretty lakes, but the small towns also make good bases, including Camigliatello in the winter.

Camping Lorica (☎ 0984 53 70 18; camping 2 people, tent & car €25) Lorica's lakeside is a particularly great place to camp. Try this place – high up and wonderful.

Valli Cupe (☎ 333 6988835; Sersale; www.vallicupe.it; per person €15) Valli Cupe can arrange a stay in a charming rustic cottage in Sersale, complete with an open fireplace (good for roast-

ing chestnuts) and kitchen. All bookings via website.

ourpick B&B Calabria (☎ 349 8781894; Scigliano; www.bedandbreakfastcalabria.it; s/d €35/50) Break through the invisible curtain of Calabrese reserve by staying at this unique B&B run by delightful couple, Raffaele and Esther. 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 overlooking endless forested vistas.

Hotel Aquila & Edelweiss (☎ 0984 57 80 44; www.hotelaquilaedelweiss.com; Viale Stazione 15. Camigliatello; s €60-80, d €80-100; ☼☼) This three-star hotel is in Camigliatello. Although the exterior is stark and anonymous, the public areas are wood-panelled, the rooms are cosy and comfortable and the location is tops.

Park Hotel 108 (☎ 0521 64 81 08; www.hotelpark108.it; Via Nazionale 86, Loricca; r €90-130) Situated on the hilly banks of Lago Arvo, surrounded by dark-green pines, the rooms here are decorated in classic bland hotel style. They are spacious and comfortable, however, and who cares about decor with views like this.

Shopping

La Sila'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 Sibaritide** (admission €2; ☼ 9am-7.30pm, closed 1st & 3rd Mon of month) is 7km away (signed 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 northwest of 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.agriturismoquerceto.kr.it; s/d €35/50; ☼), an organic farm around 4km from the centre, which produces olive oil and jams and has double rooms or mini-apartments with kitchens.

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.riservamarinacaporizzuto.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 the 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; sites for 2 people €8-12, car €4, tent €8; ☼ 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, delicious seafood. It doubles as a B&B with pleasant rooms (single/double €50/70).

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 serving reliably good dishes, specialising in seafood and pizzas. 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 Siderno, 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 mid-afternoon snooze. Located 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, as well as an archaeological section.

Caffè Imperiale (☎ 0961 74 32 31; Corso Mazzini 159; ☎ 7.30am-2am) A classic belle-époque cafe on Catanzaro's main thoroughfare that is popular with powdered ladies here for their morning cappuccino.

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* (sausages with greens), named in honour of a local football hero.

Getting There & Away

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 (€4.60, 1½ hours, eight daily) and Vibo Valentia (€3.80, 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, in Italian) as a

NO BONES ABOUT IT

It's a familiar story, just when you think you are going to get smart modern housing, a flashy commercial centre or, as in this case, spanking new regional government offices, the diggers go and discover some chipped old water vessel from Roman times. Construction grinds to a halt, workmen are laid off, and the site is a mass of rubble for months, even years. Who needs it? Sorry guys but in this case the jackhammer hit the jackpot.

In the suburbs of Catanzaro, a necropolis dating to the 5th century BC was unearthed in February 2008. The burial ground includes six tombs containing skeletons as well as grave artefacts such as amphorae. Touted as the greatest archaeological discovery in central Calabria in the last 30 years by Calabrian President, Agazio Loiero, archaeologists have noted that the find was in a zone thought to have stretched between Terina and Skilleton, two ancient cities of Magna Graecia, the name given to the former Greek colonies located here. Thanks to DNA testing, far more will be revealed.

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 walking country and the park has several colour-coded trails.

Try www.ecommerce.escursionista.it for detailed maps, such as *Carta Escursionista della Calabria – Aspromonte* 1:50,000 (€9.75).

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 aren't as good. The co-operative **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 Agrituristică Il Bergamotto** (☎ 0965 72 72 13; Condofuri Marina; s/d with half-board €35/70) 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, in Italian; Via Nazionale 306d) runs weeklong trekking excursions (€480; April to November) or a four-day trek in the snowy season (€260; 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, which sparkles temptingly across the

Strait of Messina. It is also home to the spectacular **Bronzi di Riace** and has a long, impressive seafront promenade – packed during the evening *passaggiata*. Otherwise, the city's grid system of dusty streets has the slightly disollose feel shared by most ports.

Beyond the seafront, the centre 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 problem, with the associated corrosive social effect.

On a lighter note, 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. Walk northeast along Corso Garibaldi, 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 Garibaldi 442)

Post office (Via Miraglia 14)

Tourist office (Via Roma 3 ☎ 0965 2 25 30;

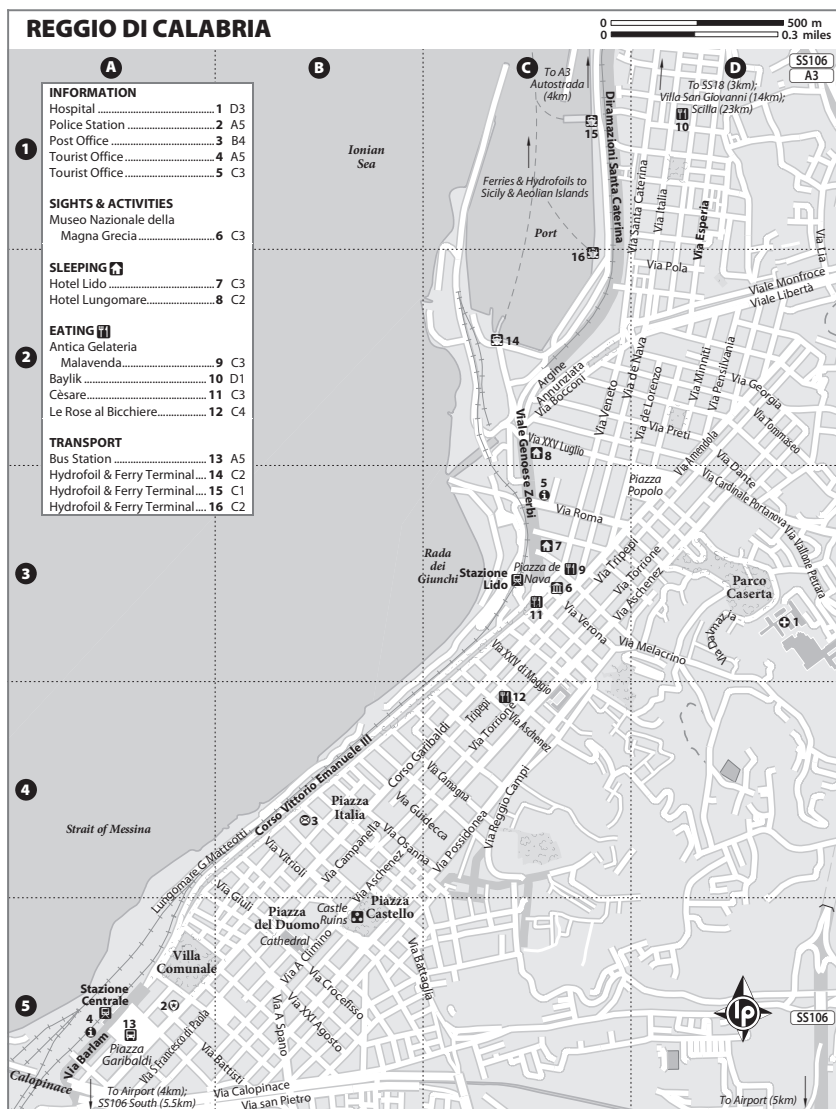
☎ 7.30am–1.30pm Mon–Fri); airport (☎ 0965 64 32 91);

Stazione Centrale (☎ 0965 2 71 20)

Sights

A Magna Graecia munificence fills the excellent **Museo Nazionale della Magna Grecia** (☎ 0965 81 22 55; Piazza de Nava 26; 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 in existence.



Sleeping

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

Hotel Lido (☎ 0965 2 50 01; www.hotellido.rc.it; Via Tre Settembre 6; s/d €80/100; (P) ♿) A pleasant hotel with modern rooms washed in pas-

tel colours with colourful artwork, Sky TV and the possibility of activities, including nearby windsurfing.

Hotel Lungomare (☎ 0965 2 04 86; www.hotellungomare.rc.it; Viale Genoese Zerbi 13; s/d €80/110; (P) ♿) The ornate wedding-cake exterior is a welcome reprise from Reggio's faceless modern blocks.

Rooms are plain and nothing special, but the 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 Amendola; ☒ 6am-midnight Sun-Fri, to 1am Sat), and **Cesare** (Piazza Indipendenza; ☒ 8am-1am), a popular green kiosk at the end of the *lungomare* (seafront).

Le Rose al Bicchiere (☎ 0965 2 29 56; Via Demetrio Tripepi 118; meals €30; ☒ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat 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; the spaghetti with clams is another winner.

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), where there are three adjacent ferry terminals. 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.meridianolines.it). Prices for cars are €12 one way and for foot passengers €1.50 to €2.80. 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 (€2.30, 1½ hours, five daily). **Costaviola** (☎ 0965 75 15 86; www.costaviolabus.it)

serves Scilla (€2.30, 45 minutes, six daily). **Lirosi** (☎ 0966 5 79 01) serves Rome (€54, 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 frequent trains to Milan (1st/2nd class €76/70, 16½ to 17½ hours), Rome (€76/54, 6½ to eight hours) and Naples (€61/42, 4½ to 5½ hours). There are also services for Turin, Florence and Venice but for a wider choice change at Paola (€30/22, 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.

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 p745) it's mostly closed in winter and packed in summer.

Scilla

pop 5134

In Scilla, cream, ochre and earth-coloured houses cling on for dear life to the jagged promontory, ascending in jumbled ranks to the hill's summit which is crowned by a castle

OUR TOP FIVE ACCOMMODATIONS IN CALABRIA

- Agriturismo Colloredo (p743), near Morano Calabro
- B&B Calabria (p749), Scigliano
- Agriturismo Querceto (p749), Santa Severina
- Albergo le Sirene (below), Scilla
- Donnaccicina (right), Tropea

and, just below, the dazzling white confection of the Chiesa Arcipretale Maria Immacolata. Lively in summer and serene in 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 glorious white sandy beach is somewhat safer today. Head for Lido Paradiso from where you can squint up at the castle while sunbathing on the sand.

Albergo le Sirene (☎ 0965 75 40 19; Via Nazionale 55; s €30-40, d €50-70; ♿) Has original tiled floors, pleasant large rooms and wistful *sirene* trompe l'œils throughout. There's the added perk of a large seafront communal terrace.

Le Piccole Grotte (☎ 338 209 67 27; Via Grotte 10; d €90-120) At the other end of Scilla, in the picturesque Chianalea district. It's housed in a 19th-century fishermen's house beside steps leading to the crystal-clear sea. Rooms have small balconies facing the cobbled alleyway or the sea.

Good seafront restaurants include **Bleu de Toi** (☎ 0965 79 05 85; Via Grotte 40; meals €40; ☞ Thu-Tue), in the Chianalea district, with a terrace over the water and excellent seafood like gratinated mussels and whitebait fritters. You can sink a beer at the **Dali City Pub** (☎ 0965 79 01 96; Via Porto), on the beach in Scilla town, which has a Beatles tribute corner (appropriately named *The Cavern*) and has been going since 1972.

Capo Vaticano

There are spectacular views from this rocky cape, with its beaches, ravines and limestone

sea cliffs. Birdwatchers' spirits should soar. Around 7km south of 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, dramatic position and sunsets the colour of amethyst. 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 icing-sugar-soft sandy beaches, all edged by translucent sea. Unsurprisingly, hundreds of Italian holidaymakers descend here in summer. If you hear English being spoken it is probably from Americans visiting relatives: enormous numbers left the region for America in the early 20th century.

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. 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.

SLEEPING & EATING

Donnaccicina (☎ 0963 621 80; Via Pelliccia 9; s €30-60, d €55-110; ♿ ☑) Set in the family home, Umberto and Rosella have opened this delightful B&B which has retained a tangible sense of history with its carefully selected antiques, canopy beds and exposed stone walls. Flat-screen TVs, in-room fridges and internet access are welcome modern touches.

Residence il Barone (☎ 0963 60 71 81; Largo Barone; www.bedebreakfast-residenza-il-barone.it; s €56-126, d €80-200; ☑ ♿) A graceful *palazzo*, it 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.

Al Pinturicchio (☎ 0963 60 34 52; Via Dardona, cnr Largo Duomo; €meals 16; ☹ closed Tue) Has candlelit tables tucked in a corner in the old town. The romance doesn't stop here, the food is similarly endearing with superb and imaginative dishes. Vegetarian (or not), don't miss the delicious vegetable antipasti.

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 47 26 69; www.lalocanda.daffina.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 €35-60, d without bathroom €50-80) is a great choice. Run by charismatic Franco in his 18th-century family home, the atmosphere is homey and welcoming. Eat at equally welcoming **Pizzeria Ruota** (☎ 0963 53 24 27; Piazza della Repubblica 36; pizzas from €4; ☹ 11am-3.30pm & 7.30pm-midnight Thu-Tue), which has splendid, big pizzas; try the namesake *Ruota* with *pomodori* (tomatoes), mozzarella, olives, tuna and peppers (€6).

