

THE 2018 NIAF REGION OF HONOR

PUGLIA

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Stretching along the Adriatic and Ionian seas, the charming Region of Puglia is famously known as the “heel of the boot.” With its unapologetic, natural beauty, its stunning beaches, picturesque villages, authentic food and slow pace, Puglia is one of Italy’s shining stars, and yet it is relatively untouched by mass tourism.

Like many regions in Southern Italy, the history of Puglia is a tangled one. Due to its position in the Mediterranean, it was vulnerable to invasions and colonization. But as we know from other Southern regions, not all invasions are bad; all have left a cultural, architectonic and gastronomic footprint in the region making it one of the most eclectic regions of Italy.

From the Greeks who left a form of dialect still spoken today in the southeast, and the Romans who completed the Appian Way through Puglia, to the Normans who left their Romanesque churches like those in Bari and Mandredonia, the Swabian fortifications like the one in Trani, and the Spanish bold baroque buildings like in Lecce, Puglia has been consistently trafficked.





Aside from its history, part of Puglia’s past remains a mystery. Take, for example, Castel del Monte, which is not a castle or a fortress. Octagonal in shape and built by Frederick II, to this day we’re not exactly sure why he built it. Or, what about those “trulli” of Alberobello? The 16th-century, conical-roofed, stone houses unique to Puglia have mysterious origins with little documentation on their unusual design.

But the allure of Puglia doesn’t end with its mysterious past. The centuries-old countryside is home to olive groves, vineyards, fruit groves and wheat fields, making it the perfect place to eat farm-to-table, the trending way to dine nowadays though the Italians have been doing it for centuries.

Steeped in culinary tradition, Puglia is the land of the highest quality of extra virgin olive oil, Cerignola olives, taralli, friselle, Primitivo wine, DOP bread from Altamura and creamy burrata cheese. Home to authenticity, Puglia is a paradise for any lover of nature and food. Burn off all those calories by walking in the 900-million-year-old Caves of Castellana, a

karst cave system some 76 yards below ground and the length of two football fields. The grandiose natural beauty will leave you in awe.

The various towns in Puglia are lovely, but you’ll need a car to navigate between them as they are spread out like jewels on a necklace. Characteristic of Puglia are small whitewashed, limestone towns like Ostuni and Locorotondo that will make you want to forget the world and get lost in their winding, narrow, quaint streets. Along the coastline are scenic towns like Otranto, Gallipoli and Polignano a Mare, where white sandy beaches and Caribbean-like waters meet the cliffs. It’s no wonder they say many people come to Puglia but only some go home.

From the countryside to the seaside, it’s Puglia’s rural simplicity and unconditional warmth that makes it one of Italy’s most unique regions. It’s a year-round destination perfect for the traveler seeking history, food, adventure, culture and above all, authentic Italian life.