

NORMAN MIGHT, BAROQUE SPLENDOUR PUGLIA ACROSS THE AGES

SUNDAY 11 – SUNDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2022 (8 DAYS)

LECTURER: CHARLES FREEMAN

£2775

- **Leisurely exploration of Puglia, unspoilt & undiscovered**
- **Wonderful Norman Cathedrals & Castles at Trani & elsewhere**
- **Day spent in the atmospheric town of Matera in Basilicata**
- **Explore Lecce, a jewel of southern Italian Baroque**
- **Excellent food & wine**
- **Comfortable 5* hotels at Martina Franca & in the historic centre of Lecce**



Matera

OVERVIEW

Puglia in ancient times was known as *Apulia*. Like much of southern Italy and Sicily it was ‘discovered’ by the Greeks who founded several coastal settlements. These were absorbed into the Roman world through conquest in late Republican times. With the end of the Roman Empire, *Apulia* had to fend for itself, highly prized not just for its agricultural riches of olives, wheat and wine but above all for its ports. These provided access for those who wished to travel on to the East. Then there were those who came from the East to invade, primarily the Byzantines and the Arabs; and eventually from the north, the Normans, the first of the many non-Italian dynasties to establish their ‘kingdoms’ in the south.

While warlords, tyrants, nobles and monarchs came and went, the rich land of Puglia played a major part in the wider struggle between Popes and Emperors which convulsed much of Italy in those times. Who controlled Puglia and from where? In brief answer, no one who lived locally. The Norman de Hauteville dynasty and their German Hohenstaufen successors were both based in Palermo. The French House of Anjou and the ‘Spanish’ Houses of Aragon, Habsburg and Bourbon-Parma were based mostly in Naples. This template of foreign domination from afar is reflected in the buildings and cuisines imported via these dynasties, their Viceroys and aristocratic families who settled in Puglia. It is extraordinary that today, so few people from outside come to this part of Italy. However, this neglect by popular tourism is one of its great attractions and surely to our advantage?

In Puglia we shall be based in two comfortable hotels. The **5* Relais Villa San Martino** is a restored nineteenth century *Masseria* just three kilometres to the south of historic Martina Franca. Facilities include a spa, fitness centre, swimming pool, restaurant and a shuttle service into Marina Franca’s old town. In Lecce we stay at the **5* Patria Palace Hotel**, ideally situated in the heart of the historic centre. Puglia has superb local cuisine so we shall eat and drink well. The pace of the visit will be gentle with free time to explore independently.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Sunday 11 September – We fly from Gatwick to Bari arriving mid morning. We transfer by coach to **Castel del Monte** where we break for an early snack lunch (not included). In the early afternoon we visit **Castel del Monte**, the most important Norman castle in Puglia. Built for Frederick II in about 1240, it is unique both in terms of its octagonal plan and its detailing. We transfer to **Martina Franca** and check into the **5* Relais Villa San Martino** for a four-night stay. After some time to rest, we have dinner in our hotel - wine, water & coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Monday 12 September – This morning we drive into **Martina Franca**, its historic centre full of Baroque enthusiasm with a large **Cathedral** and **Ducal Palace**, both of which we shall visit. After coffee, we continue northwards across the **Valle D’Itria** to the area of Puglia known as the **Murge** introducing us to the famous

limestone structures known as *trulli* houses. **Alberobello** is the best place to view these curious constructions of un-mortared limestone with conical roofs where we also have a group lunch. In the afternoon we continue the short distance to nearby **Conversano** overlooking the Adriatic. Its **Cathedral** marries Romanesque and Gothic forms well, whilst nearby the small **Civic Museum** and **Picture Gallery** houses some local ancient finds and interesting paintings. We return to Martina Franca where the evening will be free.

Day 3: Tuesday 13 September – This morning we travel northwards along the Adriatic coast to **Molfetta** to visit the excellent medieval former **Cathedral** and its late seventeenth century replacement, the latter built in the local late Baroque manner. After coffee we continue to **Trani**, an important port from where many a Crusader set off for the East. Our short walk through this charming port features small churches and medieval palaces of great charm. We end our morning with a visit to Trani's beautifully articulated **Cathedral**. We have our group lunch in one of Trani's most renowned fish restaurants. After some free time we return to the hotel where the evening will be at leisure.

Day 4: Wednesday 14 September – Though in neighbouring Basilicata, **Matera** is unique and well worth a visit. It was used by both Pier Paolo Pasolini and Mel Gibson as 'Jerusalem' for their respective films on *The Passion of Christ* and more recently in the latest James Bond. The houses and churches hewn from the natural rock, **I Sassi**, together with the later more conventional churches and palaces, are a 'must see'. Following lunch (not included) and a visit to the local **Picture Gallery**, we return to our hotel. In the evening we dine as a group in the old town of Martina Franca.

Day 5: Thursday 15 September – We make a leisurely start and depart mid-morning to the nearby town of **Ostuni**, standing proud on a hill, a whitewashed gem. Following our visit to the fine local **Cathedral** we shall enjoy a group lunch and, in the afternoon, make a brief visit to the small **Abbey of Santa Maria Cerrate**, thought to be erected by King Tancred de Hauteville in the twelfth century. We continue to **Lecce** and check into our second hotel, the **5* Patria Palace** for a three-night stay. The evening will be free.

Day 6: Friday 16 September – Today is devoted to the great architectural jewel of Puglia, **Lecce**. The beauty of this town cannot be described in words – it is more than just a renaissance and baroque 'set piece' – it cannot be missed! We spend the morning visiting a selection of its finest churches and monuments ending at lunchtime and lunch is not included. Afternoons and evenings in Lecce are dominated by shopping, eating, drinking and hectic socialising, too good a theatrical opportunity to miss - your afternoon and evening will be free.

Day 7: Saturday 17 September – From Lecce we drive down to the heel of Italy to the coastal town of **Otranto** and en route, we visit **Galatina**. In one of the town's churches the finest cycle of frescoes in southern Italy lie utterly unvisited – a 'mini Assisi', most likely painted by artists from Umbria. We continue to Otranto where you will be free to have lunch, not included. Otranto is a lovely sea-side town dominated by those twins of medieval power, a fine **Castle** and a **Cathedral**. On our return to Lecce our final group dinner will be in a local restaurant.

Day 8: Sunday 18 September – We depart for Bari Airport for our return flight to Gatwick.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2775 **Without flights** £2615 **Deposit** £395

Single Supplement £335 (in a Double/Twin Room for Sole Use)

Hotels: 4 nights with breakfast in the 5* Relais Villa San Martino near Martina Franca & 3 nights with breakfast in the 5* Patria Palace Hotel in Lecce (*Baths are available in the majority of bathrooms*)

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA2810** Depart London Gatwick (South Terminal) **0715** arrive Bari **1105**

Return: **BA2591** Depart Bari **1150** arrive London Gatwick (South Terminal) **1340**

Price includes 3 dinners & 3 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, services of Charles Freeman and our local tour manager, James Hill

Not included Travel to/from Gatwick, 4 dinners & 4 lunches



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