

A home in the Murgia

This tour starts off in the countryside of Bitonto near the "Jazzo della Ficocchia" located in a reforestation area. The jazzo (Eng. farmyard), used to shelter the flocks, is of great interest because of its typical Murgian masonry features. From there we then move on to Masseria Pietre Tagliate in the Park section called "Ceraso".

The Masseria Pietre Tagliate was built between the XV and XVI century and was used also as some sort of guesthouse (Ital. "posta"), where the shepherds who led their flocks from Puglia to Molise stayed overnight. The masseria (Eng. manor house/farmhouse) is situated in a strategic location on the edge of the canyon (lama), a narrow karst split in the calcareous surface of the plain naturally carved by water erosion, not far from water reservoirs and right at crossing of the long grassy trails called "tratturi" in the local language and used to lead the flocks to greener pastures in Molise. The masseria could not have been built on the open fields or on the plain because of the strong winds blowing in winter. It needed instead to be erected on a higher, safer site overlooking the plain.

The landscape in the area is characterized by Mediterranean steppic vegetation with its shrubs, tiny trees and short rooted weeds which are not able to hold the soil firmly and, in case of heavy rain or snow precipitations, allow the water to drain into the rock layer underneath. The advantage of this habitat is that landslides are easily prevented, whereas its disadvantage is rock cleavage phenomena throughout the year. In fact, rain- and snowfall erosion cause the rock layers to split (Ital. tagliare) into irregular shaped limestone slabs lying on the soil that needs therefore tilling.

After a stop over at an agritourist masseria we will get to the archaeological site of "Casette di Castigliolo" (Eng. Castistiolo cottages). The site used to be a prehistoric settlement from the VII-VIII century BC until the Roman times. Its defence walls are visible with their three main gates leading to the central area where a two big cone shaped limestone huts or "trulli" are located. There are some massive oak trees all around the outer construction walls. In the proximity there are old rural masonry construction such as the barrows called "specchie" in the local language, a few metres high stone heaps and tombs with an enclosed dolmen shaped room.

Overview

Natural Environment: conifer woodland, oakland, scrubland, pastures, cropland, karst phenomena.

Rural architecture: masserie, jazzi, dry-stone cone shaped huts or "trulli", dry-stone masonry construction such as fence, walls, cowsheds, reservoirs, specchie or barrows and tombs with enclosed dolmen structure.

Specialities/Delicacies: "Cardoncello" mushrooms, spontaneous greens and wild herbs, dairy, pulses and sheep meat.

Starting point: Gravina in Puglia (recommended). Alternatively from any other towns.

Target: teenagers and adults;

Type of activity: guided tour - Difficulty: easy

Time: 8.30 am; Length of the tours: all day/half day (on demand)

Transport: 15 passenger seats mini-coach