

THE APULIAN FOREST

The tour starts off at Casal Sabini, just outside the National Park where there is a grotto that seems to have been a prehistoric tomb. In fact, the bones of 16 people have been discovered in there. The remains belong to adults, young people and children buried next to their personal utensils and equipment including bowls, jugs and vases dating back to the Bronze Age.

From there we move on to the "Quite" area on the way to Santeramo in Colle, just outside the National Park territory. "Quite" means "fraction" in the local language and indicates a local area measurement used towards the end of the XIX century to divide the communal lands into small, equally shared enclosures that were endowed to farmers and citizens living in the Murgia area. A Communal Land sharing system had been established through the Act of 1 September 1806 signed by the Napoleon's lieutenant in Apulia, Giocacchino Murat, and that was inspired by the equalitarian principles of the Napoleonic social and economic system. The objective was to create a strong middle class in the Southwest province of Bari, where society was divided into the rich and the poor, the landowners and the peasants. Unfortunately, the implementation of the law had been stopped for almost a century because of some influential landowners' opposition.

During the XIX century the local feudal landlords fought the new middle class landowners and the lawmakers who allowed the equal sharing of the communal lands through equally sized enclosures and the prosecutions of those the landlords who deliberately enclosed extensive pieces of land claiming their land ownership on the ground of old feudal rights.

Charts dating back to that time show that a perpendicular road system of the area makes up a grid of rectangular, almost equally sized enclosures. The lines drawn one perpendicular to each other and the regular pattern of the enclosures map are very different from what the landscape really looks like with its wavy surface, groovy high plains and deep canyons.

After a stop over at a local agritourist masseria, we will move on to the Mercadante Forest, which is the result of the reforestation programme carried out since 1928 in the territory of Cassano delle Murge and, partially, of Altamura.

The Mercadante Forest has got an area of 1.300 hectares and was planted in order to prevent flooding in the surroundings of Bari and to keep the hydrologic system safe. Nowadays it is also a touristic area where sport and recreation activities are held in summertime.

Its location right in the heart of the Murgia landscape characterizes the forest vegetation and fauna. The species found in the area are typical from the Mediterranean evergreen pine- and pubescent oak wood with large thick foliage.

The site is particularly suitable for the reproduction of woodland and sing birds such as sparrow hawks, horned owls, robins, mistletoe **thrushes** as well as goatsuckers, common turtles, Kotschy's geckos, vipers, colubers (Lat. *Elaphe situla*), newts, green toads and green frogs.

Overview

Natural Environment: conifer woodland, oakland with some majestic examples

Rural architecture: masserie, dry stone walls, grotto tombs, "**quite**"

Specialities/Delicacies: pulses, sheep meat, dairy, spontaneous wild weeds.

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 a.m.

Length of the tours: all day/half day (on demand)

Transport: 15 passenger seats mini coach