

PEDALLING IN PUGLIA: A Drosi Volunteer Goes Pedalling in Puglia, among Trulli and Sassi

So where is Puglia? Look at a map of Italy, and you'll see a bit at the bottom that looks like a leg and a heel. Puglia is roughly in the heel. As well as some beautiful coastline (especially between Otranto, Leuca and Gallipoli), there are some lovely towns with fascinating historic centres and narrow streets, including Putignano, Locorotondo, Cisternino, Ostuni, Lecce and Monopoli. And in April, colourful wild flowers are everywhere.

Roads are not too hilly (other than those leading up to some of the small hilltop towns), and the Itria Valley is full of trulli: traditional dry stone buildings made of limestone, with conical roofs. Some of them are thousands of years old, though many have been beautifully restored. Originally, most of them were built as storehouses or homes for agricultural workers. Nowadays, many are used as shops, tourist accommodation and even homes.



At the end of April and early May, the weather can be variable: hot and dry some days, a bit cold and windy on others: but we had very little rain, the temperature was mostly good for cycling, and there was not the traffic that could make the coast road unpleasant, later in the summer. As in Wales though, roadworks sometimes took us by surprise: the first time, there was literally no way through the unmanned metal barriers, forcing us to detour some kilometres, for the sake of just a few metres of landslide. The very next day, a motorist warned us about another closed road. Our detour sent us through lanes in the middle of nowhere, but a helpful local offered to guide us. And so it was that we found ourselves on an exhilarating sprint, following his car: only to end up still on the wrong side of the roadworks! All was fine though, since he negotiated with the men on the job to let us (and himself) through.



Reasons to go cycling in Puglia? Lovely coastline, interesting small towns, cheap and easy transport (bikes go on trains free of charge), reasonably priced food and accommodation, and cakes to die for! **How to get there?** Easyjet and Ryanair go to Naples. From there, a cheap Flixbus (which unlike Itabus, takes bikes) goes to Bari, or to Matera, the UNESCO Cave City, with its 'Sassi' (buildings carved out of the rock), and former cave dwellings. Ferula Bike shop (Matera) staff are friendly and helpful. For 10 days, a lightweight trekking bike cost us 120€ each: *I want one!*