

THE GARGANO

LANDSCAPE AND AMBIENCE

THE GARGANO | LANDSCAPE AND AMBIENCE



Touring Club Italiano

THE GARGANO

LANDSCAPE AND AMBIENCE



Touring Club Italiano

This book was produced by the Iniziative Speciali of Touring Editore S.r.l. and proposed by the Gargano Local Action Group to raise the profile of the area, together with its rural tourism potential, within the framework of Project 313, Action 1, "Creation of itineraries" under Axis III of the Apulia Region Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013

Touring Club Italiano

President: *Franco Iseppi*
Managing Director: *Lamberto Mancini*

Touring Editore

Editorial coordination: *Cristiana Baietta*
PC Editor: *Deborah Terrin*
Editing Team: *Paola Bressani*
Technical coordination: *Francesco Galati*
Editorial secretary: *Laura Guerini*

The following also contributed
Project and texts: *Marco Lissoni*
Design, editing and page layout: *Noemi Zavatta*

Promoted by: Settore Iniziative Speciali of Touring Editore
Corso Italia, 10 - 20122 Milano
tel. 028526509 - fax. 028526969
iniziativespeciali@touringclub.com
Director: *Luciano Mornacchi*
Project Manager: *Gianfranco Manetti*

Prepress: Emmegi Group, Milan
Printing/binding: Rubbettino S.r.l., Soveria Mannelli (CZ)

Printed in December 2015

© 2015 Touring Editore S.r.l. & GAL Gargano
Corso Italia, 10 - 20122 Milano
touringclub.it
touringclubstore.com

Special edition code: H2533A

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, whether electronic, mechanical, by means or otherwise, without permission of the right owners. This book has been produced with the greatest care and attention to guarantee reliable and accurate details. However, we accept no liability for changed accessibility or anything else, or for any harm or inconvenience suffered as a result of information contained herein.

Touring Club Italiano is a registered trademark of Touring Club Italiano (Corso Italia 10, Milan www.touringclub.it) licensed by Touring Servizi S.r.l. to Touring Editore S.r.l.

GAL Gargano

Board of Directors

Francesco Schiavone (President)
Biagio Di Iasio (Vice-President)
Giuseppe Campanaro (Adviser)
Rossella Falcone (Adviser)
Vincenzo Fini (Adviser)
Danilo Lolatte (Adviser)
Domenico Pio Manzo (Adviser)
Massimo Mezzina (Adviser)
Francesco Tavaglione (Adviser)

Technical Staff & Consultants

Annarosa Notarangelo (Technical Manager)
Domenico Sergio Antonacci (Animation)
Pierpaolo D'Arienzo (RUP Support)
Antonio Falcone (Technical Support)
Pasquale Gatta (Animation)
Adele Ilenia Piccoli (Animation)
Luigi Scuro (Cooperation Responsible)
Francesca Toto (Animation)
Marica Triventi (Secretary)



This book has been published with funds provided by the Apulia Region under Axis III of the Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013 within the framework of Project 313, Action 1, "Creation of itineraries".

GAL Gargano is proud to present The Gargano – Landscape and Ambience edited by Touring Club Italiano continuing the tradition of publications that have helped travellers learn about Italy since the start of the last century.

An excellent product featuring splendid contents in a narration that winds through old town centres, deep valleys and coastal towers, inviting you to explore the “mountain of the sun”, its hidden scenery, traditions and flavours influenced by the East.

It is with this spirit of discovery and exploration that we invite you to read this book and learn about the Gargano before then illuminating others.

THE PRESIDENT
Francesco Schiavone



THE GARGANO

CONTENTS

Foreword **3**

INTRODUCTION

The Area **7**

The History **19**

Food and Local Products **29**

ITINERARIES

The Gargano Coast **37**

The Inland Area **59**

The Tremiti Islands **85**

A CLOSER LOOK

Ancient Pilgrimage Routes	100
The Ancient Tratturi	106
The Coastal Watchtowers	110
The Trabucchi, Traditional Fishing Devices	116
The Beaches and Sea Caves	120
Local Festivals and Traditions	128
The Gargano as Seen by Writers	134
<hr/>	
Index of Places	141
Picture Credits - Websites	144



R U G G E D C O A S T L I N E S A N D A G E - O L D F O R E S T S



THE AREA





The straight line of beaches running south down Italy's Adriatic Coast, a feature of the coastal landscape for hundreds of kilometres, in Apulia comes to a sudden halt. The flat, cereal-growing expanses of the Tavoliere, so dried up and burnt in summer, give way to rocky hills covered in forests thousands of years old. Rarely in Italy is the boundary between different areas so obvious, rarely does the landscape change so abruptly. Because of this, the Gargano, a limestone plateau jutting out into the sea, is a world unto itself, a sub-region with its own original, well-defined landscape and environment. Completely separate from the Apennines, the spur of Italy appears as a compact hilly mass whose highest points are Mount Calvo at 1,065m and Montenero at 1,014m above sea level. In the north-west, the broad limestone terraces of the peninsula slope gradually down towards the shallow coastal lagoons lakes of Lesina and Varano, teeming with fish. The eastern side of the promontory shelves steeply into the sea, with precipitous crags and white cliffs, offering marvellous, dramatic

Zagare Bay



views in every season of the year. The whole area is littered with karst phenomena because the bedrock is limestone. Rocky valleys deeply furrowed by erosion, dry stony ground, large caves which have offered shelter and protection to its inhabitants since prehistoric times, sinkholes and swallow-holes into which rainwater disappears only to reappear again in springs on the coast are the salient features of its fascinating and varied landscape. The most famous among the more than 4,000 sinkholes in the Gargano are the *Pozzatina sinkhole*, on the main provincial highway between San Nicandro and San Marco in Lamis, a huge depression more than 100m deep with a perimeter of 1,800m, and the *Cen-*

Pozzatina sinkhole; above, Vignanotica







to Pozzi sinkhole near Rignano Garganico, whose name refers to the numerous round wells called 'cutini'– used for collecting rainwater. As well as these typical karst features, spectacular cliffs, white rock pinnacles and numerous caves through its high, jagged eastern coastline, especially between Vieste and Mattinata. Only part of the magnificent forest which once covered the entire promontory remains, but the millenary woodland of the Gargano dominates the landscape on account of its sheer size and arboreal splendour. Even today, despite a horrendous fire in 2007, which destroyed part of the tree cover, it is still one of the prime features of the Gargano. Its dense, luxuriant trees of beech, turkey oak, holm oak and hornbeam, often more than 30m high, are part of the Umbra Forest, one of the symbols of this land, but the Quarto Forest, the sunken beech forest at Ischitella and Carpino, the Spigno Forest and the Spinapulci Forest are just as charming. Higher up, these woodlands

*The Umbra Forest;
opposite page, Carpino and Lake Varano*



consist of ancient beech, holly and yew, the middle ground is populated with turkey and common oak, while the lowlands are dominated by holm oak. The special micro-climate of the Gargano peninsula allows these trees to grow even at low altitudes and, more particularly, to grow abnormally large. As well as these 'green giants', the area is host to another unusual feature: more than 80 species and 17 different kinds of wild orchid, a feast for naturalists and photographers. This vast woodland area of about 12,000 hectares is populated by many animals, including fox, hare, wild boar, wildcat, badger, stone marten, various species of reptile, and numerous birds: buzzard, woodpecker, tawny owl, sparrow hawk and eagle owl. But the symbol of this forest is the Gargano roe deer, which has been able to retain the characteristics of a separate species because the promontory is so isolated, having been cut off from the Apennine range by the flat expanses of the Tavoliere, once under water.

The coastal landscape is a sea of sweet-smelling Mediterranean maquis, with ev-

Mattinata Coast

ergreen bushes of myrtle, lentisk, cistus, Italian buckthorn, *Euphorbia arborea*, tamerisk and wild olive. Along the east coast, in the dunes which separate the coastal lakes of Lesina and Varano from the sea, and in the arid sub-mountainous areas, are some of the largest expanses of Aleppo pine in Italy. The rolling hills of the north coast slope down to the lagoons, perfect terrain for growing fruit and vegetables. Almonds, olives, fruit trees and many kinds of vegetables are grown near the towns, creating a typical and well-preserved farming landscape, particularly the citrus plantations around Vico del Gargano, Rodi and Ischitella. Protected by low, dry stone walls and windbreaks, this is home to the precious groves of 'Bionda del Gargano' and 'Duretta' oranges, and 'Femminello' lemons. The 'Femminello' is apparently Italy's oldest lemon, and is protected and promoted today by a dedicated consortium. The wildlife around the coast is especially

Mattinata Plain





*South Gargano
Valleys in spring*





diverse, with yellow-legged gull, cormorant and peregrine falcon nesting in the high cliffs guarding its eastern shore. A total of 170 different bird species live in the Gargano, including many raptors and five species of woodpecker. The wetlands are home to heron, egret, black-winged stilt, coot, grebe, night heron and kingfisher, and many other species of birds on migration stop here to feed.

This extraordinary variety of landscape and natural habitats with their many rare plants and animals is the Gargano's great treasure. The **Gargano National Park** was created to protect and promote its immense natural and cultural heritage and its special landscape in 1992: 120,000 hectares stretching across a large part of the peninsula. The symbol and driver of the need to protect this area, the park works not only to safeguard its extraordinary wealth of trees, animals and birds, but to protect its mediaeval towns and historical sites, promoting old rural habitats by encourag-



*Lake Varano Isthmus;
right, Lake Lesina*

ing farmers to revive traditional farming activities. It comprises 18 municipalities in the Province of Foggia and the Tremiti archipelago, 10 nautical miles off the Gargano's north coast.

Rocky precipices and cliffs shaped by the wind, caves and reefs, a deep, rocky sea floor extraordinarily rich in marine flora and fauna – the sea of the Tremiti Islands, true jewels of the Mediterranean, is simply unforgettable. Only the first two of archipelago's five islands – San Nicola, San Domino, Capraia, the rock of Cretaccio and the island of Pianosa, the easternmost and most remote – are inhabited. The Tremiti Islands have been declared a Protected Marine Area and the island of Pianosa, situated almost in international waters, is a Special Marine Reserve, where no swimming, fishing or sailing is permitted less than 500m from its shores (only boat trips organised and authorised by the Marine Park authority).

C A V E S , H E R M I T A G E S A N D C A S T L E S : S I G N S O F T H E P A S T



THE HISTORY





It was the limestone landscape of the Gargano, with its many rock clefts and natural shelters, and the abundance of game in its forests which encouraged people to settle on the peninsula in early prehistoric times. The first vestiges of settlement date from 1,500,000 years ago: the traces of *Apricena Man*, found in a quarry at Pirro near the town of Apricena, are some of the earliest evidence of human existence in Europe. Vitaly important Palaeolithic discoveries were made in the *Grotta Paglicci* cave, near Rignano Garganico: more than 45,000 finds dated to between 500,000 and 11,000 years ago, including skeletons, hearths, graffiti on stone and bone, stone tools and extraordinary red-ochre wall paintings – the oldest in Italy – many depicting horses. Important rock carvings dating from the Late Palaeolithic were discovered in the *Sfinalicchio Refuge* near Scialmarino Beach, between Peschici and Vieste. More rock graffiti appear in *Grotta di Tommasone* at Cagnano Varano (south of the town, near the Valley of San Giovanni), and in *Grotta dell'Angelo* on Mount Devio, near San Nicandro Gar-

Abbey of Santa Maria di Pulsano

ganico. In the Neolithic age, new populations arrived from the Dalmatian Coast, the population increased and more settlements were established. Villages began to create a dense network of commercial and cultural exchange with the cultures of the Apennines and the Aegean. This is confirmed by the discovery of pottery and stone tools. However, it was the Daunian, a branch of the Iapyges tribe who, in the Bronze and Iron Ages, settled in the Gargano, giving rise to a completely new civilization, strongly marked by spirituality and religious cults. Numerous necropolises with various types of burial have been discovered in the area, together with a large quantity of grave goods. With hundreds of rock-cut tombs dating from about 2,600 years ago, the necropolis at *Mount Saraceno*, near Mattinata, is one of the most important archaeological sites in the Gargano and, indeed, Apulia as a whole. It was during the Daunian period that, due partly to this wild, bare landscape

Mattinata, Mount Saraceno necropolis





full of caves and hidden clefts in the rock, this area began to be regarded as a 'holy mountain'. This led to the creation of sanctuaries, temples and holy places, the first signs of a religious spirit which was to welcome the spread of Christianity in the paleo-Christian period and would encourage the formation of an important pilgrimage route in the Early Middle Ages.

Due to its position far removed from the Greek colonies, it was not until the late 5th century BC that Daunian territory was influenced by the Greek civilisation, bringing new customs and a more receptive attitude to external influences. The Romans arrived in the second half of the 4th century BC, when Daunian settlements sided with Rome in the struggles with the Samnites. Thanks to the fertile land and sea trading, the town of *Sipontum*, founded by the Dauni, became a Roman colony, forming a bridgehead towards the East. In the 1st century BC, the town of *Merinum*, also mentioned

*A view of Peschici;
opposite page, Santa
Maria di Siponto*



by Pliny, was an important centre for the production of olive oil and wine flavoured with resin from Aleppo pines.

The ruin and destruction caused by the Gothic War (535-553) triggered an irreversible crisis in the Roman administration and the way the area was organised. Frequent raids by Slavs and Saracens encouraged the rise of a new rock culture, with whole villages and buildings hewn out of the rock. Some of the ancient rock-cut settlements can still be seen in the *Grotte district* of Peschici, the mediæval nucleus of Vico del Gargano and the *Junno district* of Monte Sant'Angelo. But it was the Byzantine bishops who were responsible for the spiritual and civil rebirth of the towns on the peninsula, especially Lorenzo Maiorano, Bishop of Siponto. He founded the sanctuary church of San Michele and initiated that special form of pilgrimage which gave Monte Sant'Angelo and the Gargano itself a place in the mediaeval history of the West. It was the cult of St Michael, which found fertile ground in existing popular beliefs and in the presence of places re-



garded as holy, which transformed the Gargano into a land of pilgrimage. The ancient iconography of the Archangel St Michael, depicted as a winged soldier ready to fight against Evil, also encouraged the Lombards to convert to Christianity. Gradually, a route known as the *Via Micaelica* developed, a religious journey that brought mediaeval knights and pilgrims to St Michael's Cave, which came to be regarded as a fundamental stop on a pilgrimage of spirituality and prayer to the Holy Land. Hospices appeared for the pilgrims along this *Via Sacra*, a branch of the *Via Francigena*, and Christian hermitages, but also inland towns and the first monasteries, the fulcrums of splendid leading religious centres.

The Norman conquest of Southern Italy brought a period of political stability to these lands, a condition that encouraged a general and widespread economic and social revival, especially in the towns around the coast. In the Gargano, this new fervour resulted in buildings reflecting a new artistic language, completely different from the Byzantine style and embodying the

Cathedral in Vieste

features of Apulian Romanesque art. Fine examples of this are the churches of *Santa Maria Maggiore* and *San Leonardo di Siponto*, the cathedral in Vieste, the church of *Santa Maria Maggiore* and the *Baptistry of San Giovanni in Tumba* in Monte Sant'Angelo, the church of *Santa Maria di Monte Devio*, near San Nicandro, and the *abbey of Santa Maria a Mare* in the Tremiti Islands. The period of Swabian domination led to changes in society and to the landscape: the gradual enfeoffment of the land also prompted the building of castles and fortresses, the consolidation of the *castrum* of Monte Sant'Angelo and the erection of castles at Vico del Gargano, Vieste, Carpino and San Nicandro, erected during the Norman period (11th-12th century). *Pagano Castle* in Apricena is much earlier. It dates from the second half of the 11th century, and was rebuilt and fortified by Frederick II. This process became firmly established during the periods of Angevin and Aragonese domination and be

Monte Sant'Angelo castle





came a typical feature of economic and social life in the area under the Bourbons, who ruled until Italian Unification. For many centuries, the Gargano Coast was subjected to frequent attacks and lootings by Turkish pirates. According to legend one of the most terrible raids took place at Vieste in 1554: a notorious pirate, Turgut Reis, had thousands of its inhabitants decapitated, also the town of Manfredonia was sacked and burnt in 1620. The complex network of lookout towers erected to warn local populations that the Saracens were coming dates from the 16th century. The towers run the whole length of the coast in scenic positions overlooking the sea. During a brief period of French rule, from 1806 to 1815, the Gargano experienced a subversion of the feudal system, when land hitherto used for grazing and woodland was divided up to be ploughed and growing crops. During this period, land-improvement schemes were also implemented in the marshy area around Siponto, but the results of this renewal policy were less successful than expected,

Monte Sant'Angelo, sanctuary of San Michele



partly because it met with resistance from local nobles and landowners. Even after Italian Unification, a backward economy, social unrest and poverty continued to dominate the towns of the Gargano. The promontory's natural isolation encouraged people to maintain their traditional habits and lifestyles, slowing down the process of modernization and development. Not until after WWII, when emigrants began to send money home and the first signs of tourism appeared, did a gradual process of transformation begin to take place. Today, thanks to tourism, lured by the extraordinarily beautiful sea and landscape, the Gargano is one of the economic drivers of the region.

Vico del Gargano; above San Felice Tower



FLAVOURS OF SEA AND LAND



FOOD AND LOCAL PRODUCTS





The Gargano cuisine is simple and wholesome, with marvellously tasty dishes in keeping with Apulia's famous gastronomic tradition. The sea and land come together in Gargano cooking, the former inspiring its delicious fish specialities and the latter providing the strong flavours of cheese and meat from animals that still graze in the open. The wonderful bread of this area is not only served with the meal but is also a key ingredient in many dishes, where it is seasoned with extra-virgin olive oil and accompanied by vegetables. A good example is *paposcia*, a speciality of Vico del Gargano famous for its shape, bread baked in the oven with a filling of rocket, tomato and fresh ricotta cheese. A common starter is *bruschetta*, slices of toasted bread drizzled with Gargano extra-virgin olive oil, with a topping of onion, tomato and oregano. Everywhere you will see *taralli*, which also come flavoured with fennel seed, in a traditional recipe, *scaldatelli* from Monte Sant'Angelo.



Taralli with wild fennel or scaletatiddë; left, paposcia

When it comes to first courses, *orecchiette* are perhaps the most famous dish in Apulian cuisine. Made by hand with durum wheat semolina, water and salt, small ones are called *strascinatelli* while larger ones are *straculagghiuni*. Other common sights on the Gargano table are *cavateddi*, small fresh pasta gnocchi, *laine*, thin, hand-made tagliatelle, and *troccoli*, which are diamond-shaped and rolled flat with a special grooved rolling-pin. Pulses are the basis for many first courses, such as the famed *Carpino broad beans*, popular with the locals and added to traditional vegetable soups.

Muscisca is an old shepherds' dish, dried sheep's or goat's meat: it kept well and was easy to carry during the transhumance. The same name is given to another goat's meat dish, which is first boiled then marinated in vinegar and aromatic herbs before being roasted. The *Podolica* breed of domestic cattle, with



long horns and a grey hide, adapts well to grazing on poor pasture and harsh climatic conditions. Its meat is particularly prized because it is tasty and full of mineral salts. Much produce is made with milk from this breed, left to graze freely, including *mozzarella*, *burrata*, *scamorza* and *ricotta* but *caciocavallo* deserves a special mention. This medium-hard stretched-curd cheese is made with cow's milk and then matured for up to 15 months. Milk from the indigenous breed of Gargano goat is used in many types of cheese: *canestrato*, which can be eaten fresh or mature, and *cacioricotta*, only made between May and September.

A hunt for pastries typical of this region must include *ostie chjéne* (filled wafers), a speciality of Monte Sant'Angelo. According to tradition, the recipe was discovered by chance around the year 1600 in the convent of the Poor Clares of the Holy Trinity when nuns used two pieces of unconsecrated wafer to retrieve a few almonds that had fallen into a bowl of warm honey. Still today, these unusual biscuits comprise two wafers with a filling of honey, roasted almonds, sugar

The caciocavallo podolico cheese



and cinnamon. Other regional sweetmeats are *poperati* or *prupate*, large *taralli* flavoured with honey, cinnamon, cloves and citrus zest. On the subject of citrus fruit, the Gargano orchards are famous, especially in the area around Rodi Garganico, Vico del Gargano and Ischitella. With more than 800 hectares used to grow fruit, many varieties have IGP status: *Bionda del Gargano* orange, once taken to sea by sailors because it lasts so well, *Duretta del Gargano*, with firm, crisp flesh, and the sweet-smelling *Femminello*, Italy's oldest variety of lemon. In addition to these, the *Melangolo* is a dark-red, bitter orange with a sweet-sour flavour, grown mainly to extract its essential oil. Every year, between May and June, the *Sagra delle Arance* is held in Rodi Garganico. It is an excellent

Gargano oranges



chance to get to know the local citrus fruits and crafts products made from them, and to visit gardens smelling of orange-blossom.

The Gargano National Park and GAL Gargano have launched a project to revive and promote local produce, supported by local councils and associations. Special attention is focused on *baskets* and the *basket-weaving*. Once widespread it was practised by women in their spare time, when not working on the land or fishing. They wove wheat straw with rushes and reeds to create baskets in different shapes and sizes, used for storage, transporting fish and molluscs, and for preserving cheese and fruit. In recent years, basket-weaving courses have been organised to revive this age-old art, especially that of the Ischitella basket called the *cruedda*, where pieces of fabric, known as *pinù* are woven into the traditional natural fibres. Nowadays, the splashes of colour in the baskets serve only for decoration but once upon a time every family had its own weave design, a symbol that distinguished each family's products.

Poperati; above, ostie chjène



Typical woven baskets;
right, wooden looms,
Vico del Gargano

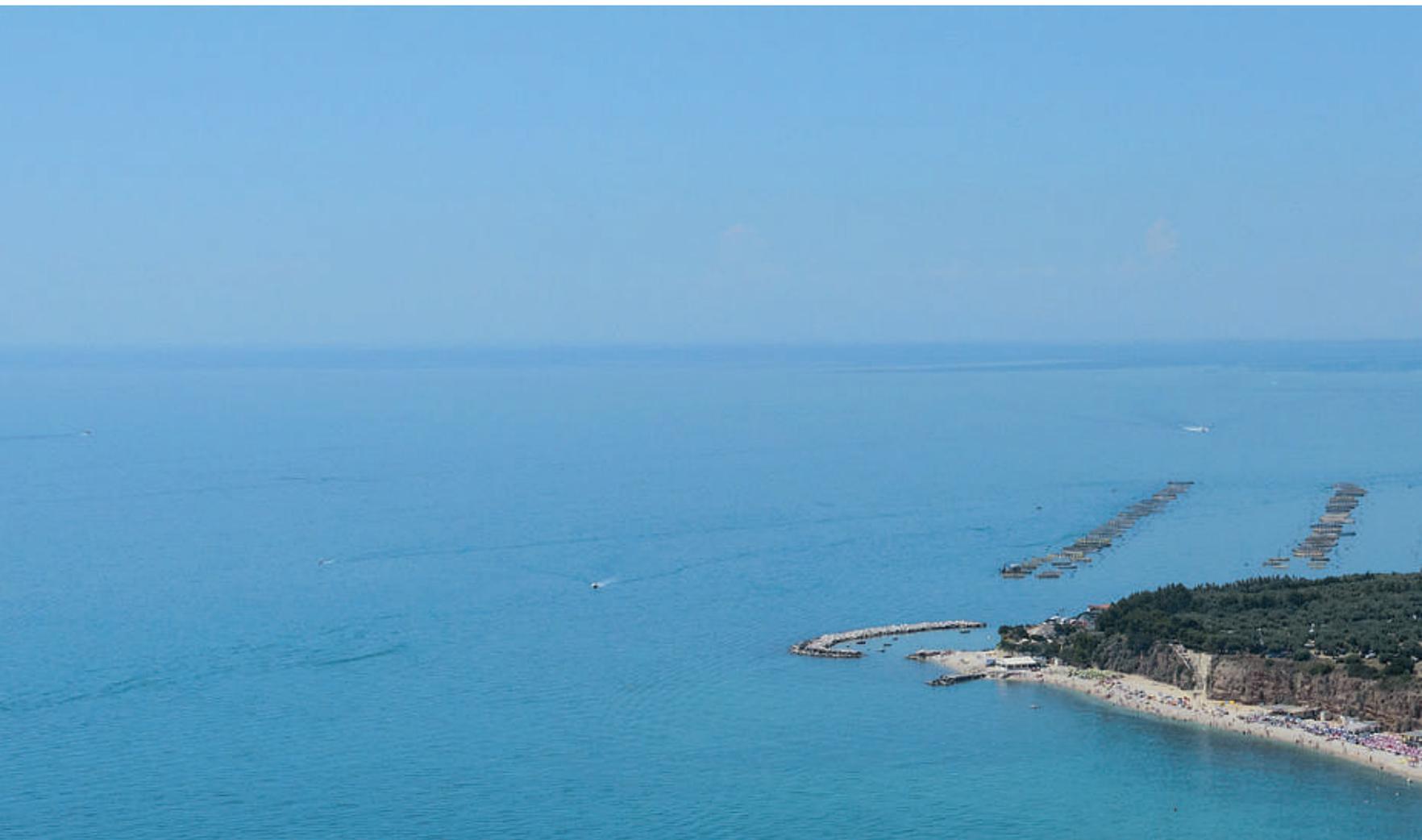
With sheep-rearing once widespread, there was always plenty of wool but also natural fibres like linen, canvas and cotton. As a result, *weaving* was very common in the towns of the Gargano for centuries. Until the mid-1900s, almost every house had a wooden loom, used to make clothes for the family and prepare trousseaux for the daughters of the family. Sheets, towels, fabric for covering mattresses and making simple clothes were all hand-produced by expert weavers. Today, the tradition is still alive at Carpino and Vico del Gargano. Artisanal workshops have been set up to produce arty fabrics using traditional techniques. The arts of *embroidery* and *lace-making* were also common in the Gargano homes, skills handed down from mother to daughter. The main aim was to produce a trousseau for the daughter, and the result was proudly displayed in the house before the wedding. Although, it is no longer the main feature of a family's dowry, in many towns of the Gargano, embroidery and lace



are still made in the traditional way. The oldest and most beautiful specimens of fabrics and embroidery are kept in the ethnographical museums of the area, where traditional costumes, trousseaux and holy vestments are on display.

Playing and singing traditional music was the norm at religious festivals and on major family occasions. The *chitarra battente* is a typical instrument of Southern Italy and is especially suited to accompanying songs; *castagnole* are a kind of castanet traditionally used to mark the rhythm of the Gargano *tarantella*, often accompanied by a trance-inducing dance. Many initiatives have been launched to revive and promote this old music form. A group called *I Cantori di Carpino* have played a large part in this, keeping the tradition alive and spreading awareness of these popular tunes. Every year, the *Carpino Folk Festival* is held in the first ten days of August: a date for traditional music enthusiasts, with performances, concerts, and dancing in the open air. The Gargano *tarantella* is the focus of this major festival of traditional music and its variations.

B E A C H E S , C L I F F S A N D O L D T O W N S O N T H E S E A



THE GARGANO COAST





The first itinerary winds around the edge of the Gargano peninsula, beginning in the north, an area of great interest to naturalists. This part of the coastline features two extensive salt water lakes: Lake Lesina and Lake Varano. From here the route continues along the main road along the coast, the *SS 89 Garganica*, abandoning it frequently to follow newer scenic roads.

The route climbs and descends in an endless series of bends, shaded here and there by rows of Aleppo pines, and has breathtaking views out to sea and towards the interior, with its patches of olive groves and prickly pears. It passes through small villages and seaside resorts in a jagged, fascinating part of the coast, with beaches galore, plenty of high cliffs and caves. On the coast around Peschici and Vieste you will notice numerous *trabucchi*, traditional wooden machines for fishing, with long poles jutting out over the sea. They are one of the most typical sights of this part of the Gargano, and you can read more about them later in the book.

View from Campi Bay



Lake Varano

A narrow stretch of land is all that separates the sea from this coastal lake, fed by subterranean currents. It has an area of approximately 60 km² and, on average, the water is about 3m deep. Famous for its eel-fishing season between October and December, Lake Varano is a fascinating area for wildlife, with interesting ecosystems. Because of this, the flat strip of land about 10 km long separating the lake from the sea, an area of about 145 hectares, called the **Isola di Varano**, was designated a Nature Reserve in 1977. These sand dunes scattered with Mediterranean maquis, eucalyptus and Aleppo pines is home to a number of animal species, a perfect habitat for fox, hare, hedgehog and numerous bird species, in-

*Lake Varano;
above, the Gargano Coast*





cluding cormorant, little egret, heron, kingfisher, grebe and many migratory species. In ancient times, the area of the present lake was a bay which the sea, wind and silt brought down by the rivers which flow into the Adriatic, gradually sealed off naturally, forming a lagoon. To prevent the artificial estuaries silting up and the lower-lying areas flooding, land improvement schemes were begun after 1900. They continued in 1915-18 for military purposes when the lake became a seaplane base during WW1, were resumed thanks to a comprehensive land improvement law passed in 1933 and concluded only in the 50s with Cassa del Mezzogiorno (Fund for the South) funds.

On the east side of the lake stands the *church of the Santissima Annunziata*, also called *church of the Crucifix* because it contains a 14th-century polychrome wooden crucifix. An old testimony to local faith and tradition, the Festival of the Holy Cross in Varano is celebrated each year on 23 April with a solemn procession.



*Marotte on Lake Lesina;
above, boat procession
with Holy Cross in Varano*

Nearby, the smaller, shallower **Lake Lesina** has a healthy fish population (mainly eels, but also sea bass, gilthead bream and mullet). It is separated from the sea by a thin sandy strip of land called the **Oasi Dune di Lesina** – covered with Mediterranean maquis and home to many species of animals and birds: colonies of duck, coot, black-winged stilt and other migratory species. The coast road that runs between the two lakes passes the ruins of one of the many fortified manor farms in the area, **Masseria Palmieri**; its four corner watch towers make it look like a small castle. Not much is known about its origins, since the old land registry maps were lost when Foggia was bombed during WW2, but it was probably built in the 17th century to protect the farmhouse, farm-worker accommodation, cowshed, store-rooms and cisterns used for storing food against pirate raids. Later more buildings were added outside its high walls: new cowsheds,



Frescoes in the church of Santa Maria di Monte Devio; opposite page, the harbour at Rodi Garganico

warehouses and store-rooms, dormitories for seasonal farm-workers and a small church. On the beach, the massive *Mileto Tower* sent warnings to the local population that pirates were arriving from the sea. This is the nearest point on the mainland to the Tremiti Islands, which lie about 20 km offshore. Not far away, on a plateau overlooking the sea, stands the small *church of Santa Maria di Monte Devio*, a treasure of Romanesque art. Originally it was linked to the Benedictine abbey of Santa Maria a Mare in the Tremiti Islands. It was built in the 11th century in a small hamlet called *Devia*, inhabited by a population of Slav origin and abandoned in the late 14th century when they were driven out by the frequent raids of Saracen pirates. The church, built on a basilica plan, has a nave and two aisles, and contains Byzantine-style fresco cycles. Those in the right aisle date from the 12th and 13th centuries, while those in the left aisle and the main apse date from the 14th and 15th centuries.



Rodi Garganico

Its enchanting borgo (mediaeval quarter) is a maze of narrow lanes and low buildings with monumental chimneys. The oldest districts cluster around the *Aragonese Castle*, built in the Norman-Swabian period, and the *Vuccolo* district, which some say may have been founded by the Lombards. Its name (from the old Italian word *vuccolare*) commemorates the local women's habit of calling to their husbands as they mended their nets down at the harbour. An evocative historical tradition, albeit poorly founded, dates the town (42m, pop. 3,741) to the 7th century AD when the Rodii Argivi, people of Greek origin, settled here. Without a doubt, its climate, lush vegetation and panoramic position on a small promontory overlooking the sea encouraged ancient people to settle here but even today the town is proud of its lovely expanses of olive groves, citrus groves and long beaches; it is now the main stepping-stone for anyone visiting the Tremiti archipelago.

Rodi Garganico is also famous for a special type of lemon grown here, the *Femminello del Gargano* – the oldest in Italy – with a strong aroma and smooth, thin skin. Citrus



cultivation is widespread here in this corner of Apulia. In fact, this town, along with Vico del Gargano and Ischitella, is part of the 'citrus triangle of the Gargano', where most of the IGP oranges and lemons are grown.

The historic town offers interesting sights, such as the **church of San Nicola di Mira**, Byzantine in origin but rebuilt in the late 17th century, with a bell tower served as a watch tower, and the *sanctuary of the Madonna della Libera*, in Baroque style. It contains a venerated icon of the *Madonna della Libera*, a panel by a Venetian artist. The most interesting building is the *church of Santi Pietro e Paolo*, built between 1216 and 1221 along with the *Franciscan monastery* of which only the cloister remains, incorporated into the houses standing opposite the main entrance. Outside the town is the *Torretta del Re*, where Joachim Murat is supposed to have sheltered after the fall of Napoleon Bona parte. Just south of the town, on a hill, stands the *Capuchin monastery*, built in early 16th century on the site of an old hermitage, with a cloister, and the Baroque *church of Santo Spirito*, consecrated in 1678.

The coast to San Menaio

San Menaio

In the north of the Gargano, on the coast road running eastwards, lies San Menaio, a hamlet in the municipality of Vico del Gargano. Its beautiful beach of fine golden sand and the broad *Marzini Forest*, with ancient Aleppo pines fringing the beach and village, have been the fortune of this now popular seaside resort. On the promenade, almost marking the border between the old part of town and the new residential tourist district, stands the 14th-century *Preposti Tower*, built as a lookout tower and fortified under the Spanish (16th century) to counter the frequent Saracen raids. The winding coast road climbs steeply around a promontory with wonderful views and passes another old building: the *Monte Pucci Tower*, with its fine view out to sea, over the *Calenella Plain* and the long beach of San Menaio. Perched on a high limestone cliff, the top of the original tower is missing. The fact that it is so small suggests it served essentially as a watch-tower, with

Monte Pucci Tower





no defensive purpose. Between the Piana di Calenella and the tower, close to the road, is a large archaeological site: the vast **Mount Pucci necropolis**, with palaeo-Christian underground tombs dating from the 4th-7th centuries AD. On the promontory, jutting out into the sea are picturesque *trabucchi*, traditional fishing contraptions built entirely of wood.

Peschici

The historic part of this seaside resort has old-fashioned charm, with its cobbled streets, small squares and flights of steps leading down to the sea. The rows of low, whitewashed houses capped with small grey domes (*lamie*) give it a strange, slightly oriental feel. Built on a rocky cliff rising up out of the sea, Peschici (90m, pop. 4,411), is now a major seaside and tourist resort. This charming town with magnificent views overlooks one of the Gargano's most beautiful bays and is a

The complex wooden structure of a traditional trabucco

busy fishing port, the starting-point for trips to explore local beaches, small inlets and caves by boat. Its name – which possibly derives from the word *pesekcist*, meaning 'pure sand' – harks back to the town's foundation in 970 by Slav soldiers (Dalmatians and Slavs), sent here to counter the threat posed by Saracen pirates. It was subsequently contested by the Normans, Swabians, Venetians and Aragonese.

You can still see fragments of the town's old defensive walls in the centre of the old town. The *Mother Church*, dedicated to St Elias, was founded in the 13th century but rebuilt in the 16th century. The *medieval castle*, altered in the 18th century, is situated behind the walls of the so-called *recinto baronale* (Baronial enclosure). Peschici's links with the Benedictine abbey of the Tremiti can be seen in the ruins of the *church of Santa Maria di Càlena* (just outside the town, on the Vieste road). It was founded in the first half of the 9th century and donated by Archbishop Leo of Siponto to the Benedictine monks on the Island of San Nicola. It became their headquarters on the mainland. The small *sanctuary church of the Madonna di Lore-*



to, 2 km past the town, is of interest for the votive offerings from sailors adorning the apse. According to tradition, it was built in the 17th century by a group of sailors miraculously saved from a terrible shipwreck when guided ashore by a light at the point where the church now stands.

After Peschici, beyond *Punta di San Nicola* with its picturesque *trabucco* (fishing device), the SP 52 enters a pine-forest, with the enchanting **Manaccora Bay** on the left. This area was one of the first places in the Gargano to be designated for tourism. The huge *Grotta di Manaccora*, which can be accessed on foot along a scenic path, is an important Bronze Age site. Here and there, small roads branch off the coast road leading down to jagged *Manacore cliffs* overlooking beautiful beaches scattered with rocks, tourist resorts and the remains of lookout towers. Near the long *Scialmarino Beach* – also known as *Cala Lunga* and site of another interesting *trabucco* – is another

View of the coast near Peschici; above, Peschici, well in the cloister of Santa Maria di Càlena



*Above and right,
San Nicola trabucco*



TRABUCCHI ABOVE THE SEA





archaeological site: the *Sfinalicchio Refuge*, where rock carvings dating from the Late Palaeolithic have been discovered. Situated near the beach, the little *church of Santa Maria di Merino* recalls the ancient Roman town of *Merinum*, cited by Pliny the Elder. Here archaeologists have uncovered a complex system of water channels and the remains of various buildings dating from the Augustan period. A large palaeo-Christian necropolis with rock tombs dating from the 2nd-4th centuries has been discovered in the nearby *caves of Salata and Craparezza*, in a location with breathtaking views out to sea. The area, which has been declared a nature and archaeology reserve, features two streams and a small salt-water marsh, inhabited by terrapin, eel and mullet, which breed here. Closer to Vieste, long sandy beaches with rows of parasols alternate with little inlets in the rock, only reached by boat or on foot. On this section of the coastline, you can see the long poles of the traditional wooden *trabucchi* anchored to outcrops of rock.

The long sandy beach at Vieste; opposite page, Vieste

Vieste

It was inevitable that the beach facilities, the rich sea floor so popular with divers and the crystal-clear water, often awarded Blue Flag status for its quality, should turn Vieste (43m, pop. 14,006 into the Gargano's main holiday resort. Even more importantly, the town itself, with its old town poised above the sea on a tongue of rock, has always fascinated visitors and holidaymakers with its timeless charm. Small white houses suddenly interspersed with tiny squares, flights of steps spanned by slender arches and narrow streets which come alive in the summer months with their many open-air restaurants, craft shops, boutiques and venues. The mediaeval town has transformed itself to meet visitor demand, yet has maintained its colours and its atmosphere. A Daunian town in ancient times, Vieste later became a Greek colony and then a Roman *municipium* (probably the ancient *Apeneste*, cited by Ptolemy, and *Merinum*). It was of strategic importance due to its position dominating the sea,





but this also posed a threat to its inhabitants, who were often attacked by Turks and Saracens. This rocky promontory with a sudden drop down to the sea is the site of a *trabucco*, the plain exterior of the *monastery of San Francesco* and an imposing triangular **castle**, built by Frederick II in 1240. It is thought to stand on the site of an existing Norman building. Having been remodelled in 1537, it was fortified in several stages to defend it from the Saracens. A remarkable example of Apulian Romanesque, the **cathedral** dedicated to the Assumption was built in the 11th century on the site of an earlier building, possibly a pagan temple dating from the Roman period. The bell tower was rebuilt in the Baroque style in 1772 after the first one collapsed. The work performed in the 19th century did not alter the structure or the sombre stone facade of the church. The interior, decorated with original columns and capitals, houses a 16th-century panel of the *Virgin and Child*, surrounded by panels with *Stories of Christ and the Virgin*, a marble low

Punta San Francesco near Vieste

relief of the *Deposition* dating from the 16th century and a venerated *statue of St Mary of Merino*, lone survivor of a 13th-14th-century wooden sculpture depicting the Annunciation. Near the cathedral is a sad reminder of the Saracen invasions, a large mass of rock called the *Chianca Amara* where hundreds of the town's citizens were beheaded by the Turks, led by the ruthless Turgut Reis. In 1554, he besieged the town with his fleet of 70 galleys for seven long days. The *Museo Malacologico* (Museum of Malacology) in Via Pola has an unusual collection: more than 11,000 shells from all over the world. Wandering through the charming streets you will come across the beautiful **Piazza del Seggio**, where an old sun-dial decorates the former authority building. The modern town lies on the flat *Punta di Santa Croce*, facing north. Nearby is the busy harbour with its fishing boats, where ferries depart for the Tremiti Islands. Opposite the little town of *Marina Piccola* is the little *Island of Sant'Eufemia*, with its lighthouse built in 1867 considered an im-



portant aids to Adriatic navigation. South of Punta di San Francesco, in the direction of Pugnochiuso, is the long **Pizzomunno Beach**, named after the white mass of limestone (about 26m high) which has become the town's symbol.

The SP 53 coast road

The SP 53 road from Vieste to Mattinata showcases one of the most enchanting and scenic parts of the Adriatic coastline. Along a series of bends and hills, it follows the jagged rocky coast dotted with rocks, caves and sheer cliffs. It sometimes passes isolated bays, sandy beaches, small inlets and coves which can only be accessed by boat. The famous beauty spot called the *Architiello*, a natural arch shaped by the sea and a 16th-century lookout tower mark **San Felice Bay**, edged with beautiful beaches of golden sand. On the easternmost part of the promontory, the *Testa del Gargano* is

*A detail of the Vieste Cathedral;
above, the harbour; centre, Vieste lighthouse*



the site of a *trabucco*, one of the picturesque local wooden fishing devices, its long poles hanging over the sea with nets suspended beneath. Surrounded by Aleppo pines and filled with the intense fragrance of the Mediterranean maquis, the small bays and inlets around **Pugnochiuso Bay**, one of the Gargano's most famous beauty spots, can only be reached by boat or on foot. It was in this spectacular natural setting overlooking crystal-clear waters that the tourist boom of the Gargano began. In the 1960s, Enrico Mattei, chairman of the ENI company, built the first resort here, the ENI Holiday Centre, for his employees.

Proceeding further along the provincial highway, you pass the tall pinnacles of the lovely **Zagare Bay** also called *Mergoli Bay*, gigantic rocky spires shaped by wind and sea. On the way, you pass the *Santa Tecla necropolis*, with underground rock tombs dating from the 6th-3rd century BC.

Vignanotica Beach;
opposite page: left,
San Felice arch;
right, Zagare Bay





Mattinata

Surrounded by almond and olive groves, the town (74m, pop. 6,419) sits in a panoramic position not far from the sea, by a beautiful crescent-shaped bay. Known as the white butterfly of the Gargano because of its layout (its 'wings' span two hillsides), it is famous for its olive oil, of very high quality due to its sheltered position away from the northerly and north westerly winds. The area was settled in ancient times, as shown by finds made at the Daunian necropolis of nearby Mount Saraceno, but the town was founded in the Roman period as an important trading port. Near the modern harbour lie the ruins of **Villa di Agnuli**, built in the 1st century and altered in the 4th-6th centuries: some walls and rooms used for storing wine, oil and foodstuffs survive. Two important collections document the history of the local area: the **Matteo Sansone Museum**, housed in the pharmacy of the same name, which has an unusual ethnographic and archaeological collection of over 400 pre-historic exhibits, from the Hellenistic,

Mattinata Coast



Daunian and Roman periods; the second is the **Civic Museum**, which has splendid grave goods from the Daunian necropolis (7th-6th century BC) at Mount Saraceno, with vases, bronzes, sculpture and jewellery. In the courtyard of the modern building housing the museum are two large rocks found near the small harbour, bearing the footprints of dinosaurs dating from 100-150 million years ago. The oldest part of town, the **Junno district**, is a maze of small white-washed houses. Among the narrow streets and flights of steps you will notice curious low rectangular dry-stone buildings known as *pagghiere* (barns). These date from the mid-18th century and were once used for storing foodstuffs.

The Mount Saraceno Necropolis

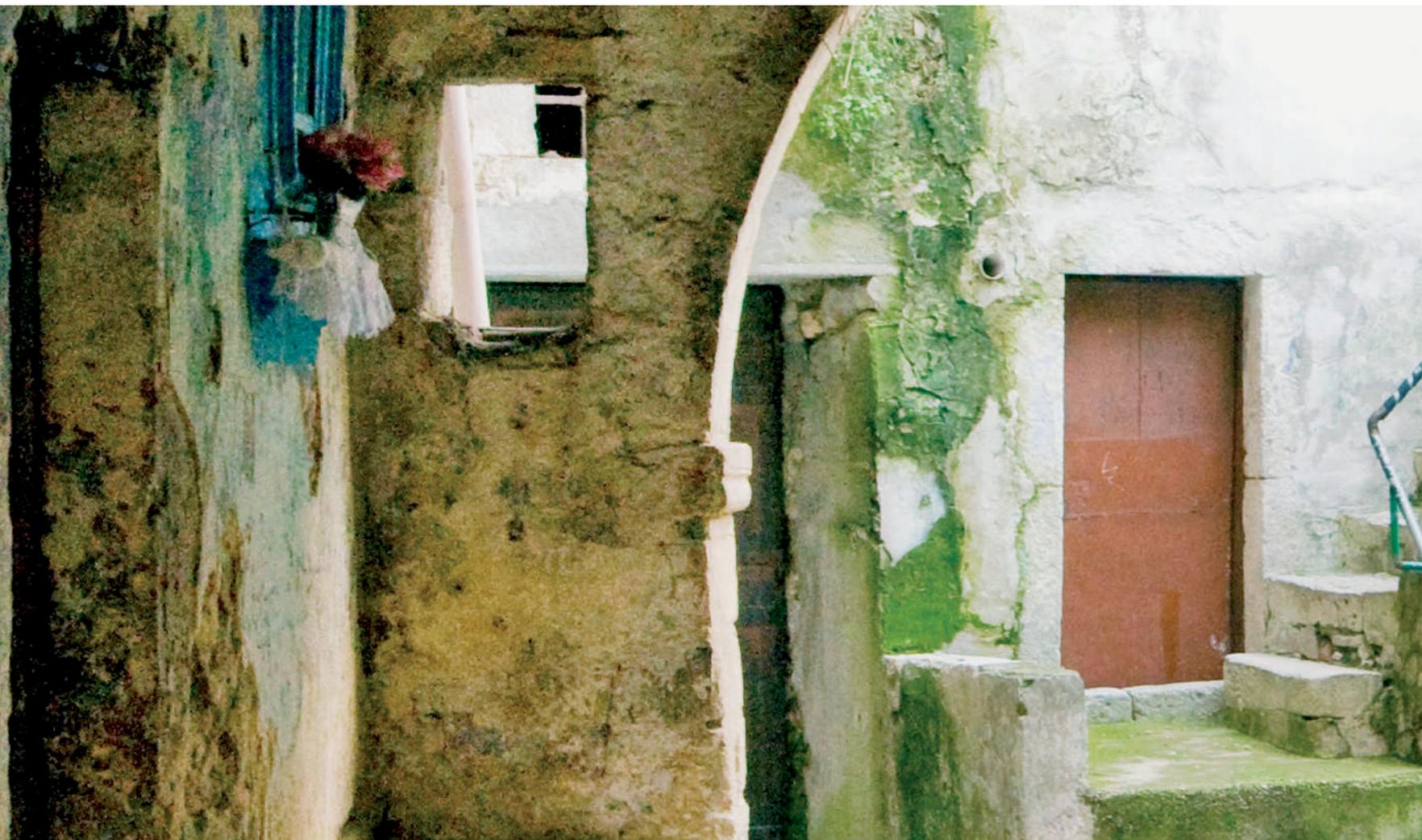
A few kilometres from Mattinata, on the low hill of *Mount Saraceno* (260m), reached on foot, is the site of a **Daunian necropolis** with hundreds of tombs hewn out of the rock and covered with

slabs of rock known as Daunian stele. This archaeological site, which dates from the 7th-6th century BC and is one of the most important in the Gargano has produced splendid grave goods with objects made of bronze, iron, amber, bone, ivory and pottery as well as beautiful anthropomorphic jewellery kept in the Civic Museum at Mattinata. Near the necropolis, the discovery of Bronze-Age huts and the remains of fortifications point to a large Saracen settlement (9th and 10th centuries), cited in its name.

Another environmentally and historically fascinating place to visit is **Mount Sacro**, reached from the main road to Vieste, 3 km past Mattinata. This special place is home to precisely 60 different orchid species, some endemic. A footpath leads to the top of the hill and the romantic ruins of *Santissima Trinità abbey*, a monastery dating from the 10th-11th century, steeped in vegetation. It later became an important Benedictine abbey.

*Mount Sacro, Mattinata;
above: one beach of Mattinata*

A R T , N A T U R E A N D R E L I G I O U S C U L T



THE INLAND AREA





The proposed itinerary explores the Gargano peninsula inland, an area testimony to local religious fervour, art and culture, all in a unique and extraordinarily beautiful natural environment. The authority of the **Gargano National Park** was created in 1995 to protect its huge expanses of beech, turkey oak, holm oak and hornbeam forest in which the special micro-climate allows trees here to grow tall (to a height of 30m). From San Nicandro Garganico, where the route starts, the road winds through olive groves, with beautiful views across Lake Varano to Ischitella. After Vico del Gargano, the landscape changes radically as the road plunges into the dense and shady Umbra Forest. It continues through clusters of woods and open glades to Monte Sant'Angelo and its famous sanctuary church, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From here, you continue to San Giovanni Rotondo, the pilgrimage site associated with Padre Pio, a monk from Pietrelcina. Having crossed an area full of karst phenomena, such as swallow-holes and caves, the route ends at Rignano Garganico, with

*The Umbra Forest,
Gargano National Park*

magnificent views commanded by its amazing position on a precipice at the far end of the plateau. Inland Gargano can be partly explored by train thanks to the services operated by the **Ferrovie del Gargano**, a railway company set up in 1931 to connect the Tavoliere to the Adriatic Sea. Departing from the station of San Severo, these delightful little trains climb into the mountains, stop at Apricena, San Nicandro, Cagnano Varano and Carpino, and finally reach the sea at Rodi Garganico. After San Menaio, the journey ends at Calenella station, near Peschici.

San Nicandro Garganico

Wild olive trees have traced the landscape around this fairly large town (224m, pop. 15,805) set on a hill with views over the coast around Lesina, the sea and the Tremiti Islands. It has a castle probably occupied by people fleeing from *Devia* (already mentioned in the first itinerary) who, in the late 14th century, left their seaside home to flee the Saracen incursions. Its white houses with gabled roofs line the narrow, winding streets of the old town, the *Terravecchia*



district, huddled around the **castle**. Built in the 15th century, this stands on the ruins of a Norman fortress.

Next to the castle, Palazzo Fioritto hosts the *Archaeological, Ethnographic and Folk Museum*, with an interesting display of archaeological finds and objects associated with religious festivals and traditional farming. Not far from the **cathedral**, rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake.

The especially beautiful coastline delimited by ancient lookout towers at each end – the Cala Rossa Tower and the Mileto Tower – the latter is one of the most imposing and best preserved lookout towers on the Adriatic Coast. It consists of about two kilometres of low, rocky coastline, dotted here and there with little bays surrounded by utterly unspoilt Mediterranean maquis.

Those staying in San Nicandro should visit the **Spinapulci Forest**, an expanse of 900 hectares of enormous old beech and turkey oaks. These giant trees, typical of the Gargano National Park,

The Madonna of Christ procession in Rignano Garganico; above, the Umbra Forest



are proof of this area's unusual microclimate, which allows the trees to thrive at low altitudes and to grow abnormally high. From the road between San Nicandro and San Marco in Lamis, another road leads to one of the most interesting examples of karst landscape, an area dotted with caves and swallow-holes. The **Pozzatina sinkhole** is an enormous oval crater more than 600m wide and 100m deep formed by a combination of collapsed caves and eroded limestone rocks on the surface. At the bottom of the sinkhole is a thick layer of red clay and a swallow-hole that drains away the rainwater, explaining why the area is so fertile. There are many karst caves, some of which may be visited with a local guide.

The most famous caves include the *Grotta delle Colonne d'Ercole*, the *Grotta delle Streghe* and the **Grotta di Pian della Macina**. The two chambers of this natural cave, accessed by a tunnel approximately 30m long, contain beautiful limestone formations, some with white calcite outcrops.

Cagnano Varano

Cagnano Varano

The mediaeval district of this town (165m, pop. 7,697) overlooking Lake Varano was probably founded in or around the year 1000. Nearby, just south of the modern town, stood the ancient settlement of *Uria*, mentioned by Strabo, Pliny and Ptolemy. This flourishing centre was later a Roman colony. Legend tells that it was engulfed by a tsunami in the Imperial period. The old town of Cagnano centres on the *Baronial Palace*, erected over the ruins of a Norman fortress, and the *Mother Church* of Santa Maria della Pietà, built on a Latin-cross plan and decorated in the Baroque style. About 2 km from away, **St Michael's Cave** contains a spring with miraculous properties, especially for curing eye diseases, and it has become an very important pilgrimage site.

Legend tells that St Michael stopped here to rest and led his horse to drink from the spring, leaving the hoof print



St Michael's Cave, Cagnano Varano



of his horse and the mark of one of his Archangel wings in the rock. On the feast of St Michael, 8 May, there is a solemn procession to the cave.

Carpino

Set atop a hill with views across acres of olive groves, Carpino (147m, pop. 4,380) has earned its name as the *city of olive oil*. The mediaeval town dates from the year 1000 and is charming, with houses lining narrow streets. Flights of steps with long balconies, *mugnalë*, provided access to the first floors and were used for traditional craft activities, especially making baskets, and embroidery works. Little remains of the *castle* built by the Normans. One of the most interesting churches is that of *San Cirillo*, founded in the 12th century and later remodelled in the Baroque style; it has a fine Romanesque doorway.



Ischitella

The hill on which the town (314m, pop. 4,578) is built, (home to the Illuminist philosopher Pietro Giannone), commands views out to sea, as far as the Tremiti Islands. All around, juicy, sweet-smelling citrus fruit grows in the famous orchards of an area known as the 'citrus district': the Bionda del Gargano and Duretta, two qualities of orange, and Femminello, the latter being Italy's oldest type of lemon.

Like other towns in inland Gargano, the mediaeval quarter, called *Terra Vecchia*, dates from around the year 1000. Visit the 18th-century *Baronial Palace*, erected on the site of an earlier building (12th century), the Baroque church of *Sant'Eustachio* and the monastery of *San Francesco*, built in the 16th century, as was the adjacent church. Opposite the Franciscan monastery stands an ancient tree that is seemingly upside-down

Monastery of San Francesco,
Ischitella; left, Carpino



with its roots stretching skywards. Known as the *cypress of St Francis*, it is associated with an old legend saying that the tree grew from the stick of St Francis, who was passing through the town and, having driven his stick into the ground on this very spot, knelt down to pray.

A few kilometres from Ischitella is the *abbey of San Pietro in Cuppis*, recorded as early as 1058 and of which only a few ruins remain; the church has one of the few examples of iconostasis preserved in Italy. On the shores of Lake Varano, the church of the Santissima Annunziata has an old and much revered wooden crucifix, described in the first itinerary. Nearby, *Mount Civita* is the site of necropolises dating from the 5th-4th century BC and the so-called **Etruscan Cave**, a karst cave full of limestone concretions. We recommend a walk into the heart of the promontory, for example to the *Ischitella and Carpino Forest*, a nature reserve with beautiful turkey oaks and beech trees. The sunken beech forests

Ischitella, Vico del Gargano, Peschici, the Umbra Forest; right, Vico del Gargano



of Ischitella, with huge trees growing at an unusually low altitude, are one of the Gargano's most typical and unusual natural phenomena.

Vico del Gargano

Only a few kilometres from the coast and the lovely *beaches of San Menaio and Calenella*, this town (445m, pop. 7,807) sits on a hill amid the citrus groves and the gloriously lush Umbra Forest. Legend tells that, having been founded around the year 900, it was passed by Otto I to the Slavs of Dalmatia and Istria as a reward for liberating the area from the Saracens. The old town, which still looks mediaeval, has three districts – *Civita, Terra and Casale* – a labyrinth of steps and narrow alleyways. People lived on the first floor of the traditional terraced houses (called *a pujeddë*) while the ground floor was used as a stable or for storage. A few traces of defensive *walls* and ruins of the *castle* remain from the Norman-Swabian period, when the town was flourishing which occupies a key position in the town's fortification system and dominates access to the old districts of



Civita and Terra. Its round tower and rooms with cross-vaulting have been incorporated into the surrounding houses. The historic centre features a number of 18th-century noble palaces and several churches: in the heart of the Civita district is the mighty dome of the *Mother Church*, dedicated to the Assumption; the *church of San Marco* dates from the 14th century but has been altered several times; the *church of San Giuseppe* has a wooden statue of the *Dead Christ*, carried in solemn procession through the streets on Good Friday. *Palazzo Della Bella*, built in the early 20th century, is supposedly a copy of Palazzo Vecchio in Florence.

An old underground olive press now houses the **Trappeto Maratea Museum**, illustrating how olives are traditionally processed to produce olive oil. The collection includes a wooden press, old tools for processing the olives and others for farmwork. In the town are several other *trappeti*, olive presses hewn out of the rock, some restored and converted. The **Antiquarium Civico** has an interesting collection of local

Vico del Gargano

finds, such as the *Mount Tabor necropolis* (4th-3rd century BC) and *Mount Pucci*, with palaeo-Christian hypogea dated 4th-7th centuries AD. There is a Roman section (finds from 4th-3rd centuries AD) plus objects and grave goods dating from the Early Palaeolithic to the Iron Age: arrows, spears, pottery, fibulas, jewellery and amber objects.

Just outside town is a **Capuchin monastery**, founded in 1556 but rebuilt after an earthquake in 1646. It has a splendid art collection including a 16th-century painting of the *Nursing Madonna*, a large 17th-century *polyptych* by Andrea Vaccaro and, in the cloister, a 17th-century fresco depicting the *Archangel St Michael*. In the square in front of the monastery is an ancient turkey oak 17m high with a trunk 5m wide. Its branches have a circumference of 50m and you can still see a split that appeared in 1934 when a huge branch fell off.

Underground olive press Vico del Gargano



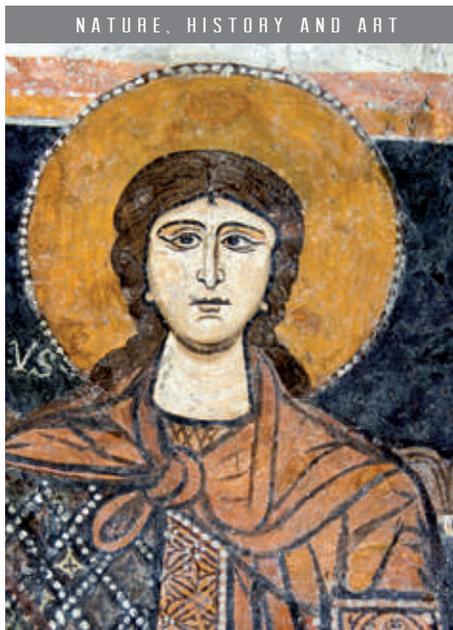


Vico del Gargano offers plenty of scope for walking in local woods with gigantic trees and the northern side of the Umbra Forest, the site of the **Sfilzi Nature Reserve**. With an area of 56 hectares, the reserve is a dense forest of maple, beech and turkey oak, home to many wild animals. It also contains one of the few perennial fresh-water springs in the Gargano, known as the *Sfilzi Spring*, a stone fountain built by local hermits.

The Umbra Forest

The name of this huge, dense, shady forest derives from the Latin word *umbra*, meaning a dark, remote place. Impressive for its size and beautiful trees, it sprawls across the eastern side of the Gargano peninsula. The millenary Umbra Forest covers an area of about 12,000 hectares. It is the green breathing space

of the National Park and you would never know there had been a serious fire in 2007 as the woods look unspoilt. This extraordinary 'temple of Nature' includes areas under special protection (access is prohibited also to walkers) and there are many good, well-marked footpaths. Higher up, the vegetation is dominated by beech trees, sometimes 30m high, but there are also yew, hornbeam, maple and elm. Lower down, the most common trees are turkey oak, common oak, holm oak and field maple. The undergrowth is extraordinarily rich too, a perfect habitat for orchids, many species being endemic. Numerous animals live in the shade of these huge trees: common species such as wild boar, hare, fox, pine marten and hedgehog, plus rarer ones such as red deer and wildcat. The bird species include the rare white-backed woodpecker and raptors such as the eagle owl, peregrine falcon, tawny owl and common buzzard. However, the animal that best typifies the forest is the Gargano roe deer, a species native to this area, distinguished by its small size and un-



usual colour of its coat, with no white markings on the throat and neck.

Monte Sant'Angelo

According to legend, in the late 5th century, the Archangel St Michael appeared in one of the many caves here. This event sealed its fate and by Lombard times it was an important stopping-place on the *Via Sacra Micaelica*, the medieval pilgrimage route from Mont Saint-Michel in France to the Holy Land. The first sanctuary church dedicated to the Archangel St Michael was built along with pilgrim accommodation and houses around the cave. This nucleus gradually expanded into a town in a splendid position on the hilltop, a maze of narrow streets and steps. With its major mediaeval monuments, white, tightly-packed terraced houses and pervasive spiritual aura, Monte Sant'Angelo (796m, pop. 12,739) should not be missed.

The main focus of the town is the **sanctuary church of San Michele Arcan-**

Church of S. Trinità at Monte Sant'Angelo; above, fresco in Santa Maria Maggiore church



gelo, regarded as the oldest and most important place of worship in the Western cult of St Michael. In 2011, it became a UNESCO World Heritage site. According to tradition, around the 500, the Bishop of Siponto, Lorenzo Maiorano, created the cult of the cave where the Archangel St Michael was said to have appeared. This became the fulcrum of the church. Historical documents, however, date the creation of the first structures to the 7th century. Its mighty **bell tower**, also known as the *Angevin Tower*, was built in 1274 by Charles of Anjou, with an octagonal shape reminiscent of the towers of Castel del Monte. Beyond the *atrium*, the facade, featuring two doorways with pointed arches, dates from 1865 (the one on the right is 14th-century; the other is a 19th-century imitation). Here, a long, broad rock-hewn staircase leads down to the 17th-century *Bull Gate* and the inner courtyard where tombs decorate the walls. At the far end is a splendid **bronze door**, made in Constantinople in 1076. Its

Sanctuary church of San Michele Arcangelo



24 panels depict scenes from the Bible, the apparitions of St Michael and episodes from the history of the church. The **interior** formed from a nave with three spans has a wonderful atmosphere, and on the right the grotto of the apparitions took place (the *Celeste Basilica*) with the *statue of St Michael* in white Carrara marble attributed to the Sansovino school (1507). Next to the statue of the saint, depicted with a sword and shield as the leader of a heavenly army, is a 12th-century *bishop's throne* on two crouching lions. Other fine artworks include the *altar of the Virgin*, with stone carvings from the 11th and 12th centuries, the *altar of St Peter*, with two twisted columns dating from the 11th century, the *altar of St Francis* and the *Baroque Chapel of the Sacrament*, both dating from the 17th century. The treasure of the sanctuary church, kept in the **Museo Devozionale** (Museum of devotionality), comprises reliquaries, sacred vestments and votive offerings,



evidence of people's devotion to the cult of the saint. The most important and precious object is the old **icon of St Michael**, a Lombard work in gilt copper of the 11th century.

The oldest church in town is dedicated to St Peter. This, the adjacent baptistry of San Giovanni in Tumba and the 13th-century church of Santa Maria Maggiore form the **monumental complex of St Peter**. Little survives of the original early mediaeval church, remodelled in the 11th century. Built on a basilica plan with a nave and two aisles, it has a fine Romanesque apse. Next to it is the *baptistry of San Giovanni in Tumba*, built in the early 12th century. Some believe this was the baptistry of the church of San Pietro, while others think it is a mausoleum. For this reason, it is known as the **Rotari Tomb**. The building itself is quite complex, with a square base and an octagonal drum supporting a dome (the *tumba*). Fine low reliefs decorate the *door* leading into the church and the pillars supporting the four large pointed arches have splen-

Reliefs of the Rotari Tomb, Monte Sant'Angelo

did carved capitals. There are traces of 14th-century frescoes on the walls and, in the floor, two round holes which, according to tradition, were made in 1666 to found the largest San Michele bell. Beside the baptistery stands the old **church of Santa Maria Maggiore**, regarded by some as the cathedral of Monte Sant'Angelo. A masterpiece of Apulian Romanesque, it was rebuilt in the 11th century by Leo, Bishop of Siponto, and remodelled in the late 12th century at the wishes of Constance d'Hauteville. It has a magnificent *door* with a canopy, and beautifully carved jambs, architraves and cornices. Inside are carved capitals and fresco fragments from the 12th-13th centuries.

At the top of the town, where views stretch as far as the Bay of Manfredonia and westwards to the Tavoliere and Murge, stands the **castle** (11th century). Traces of burials discovered during recent restoration work on the moat suggest the fortress, rebuilt and altered sev-



Rotari Tomb interior, Monte Sant'Angelo



eral times, was constructed on the site of an Iron-Age necropolis (8th-7th centuries BC). In the 11th century, Robert Guiscard built the imposing *Giants' Tower*, 18m high with walls 3m thick. In the 13th century, Frederick II converted the castle to a residence for his favourite, Countess Bianca Lancia. Later on, other changes were made: the Angevins used the castle as a prison and, in the late 15th century, the Aragonese added more fortifications.

In the old and picturesque **Junno district**, with its identical, tightly-packed white terraced houses, visit the *Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions of the Gargano* in the former 14th-century Franciscan monastery. This fine collection, amassed after 1925 by the ethnologist Giovanni Tancredi, contains objects offering an insight into local traditions, pilgrimages, farming activities and the daily lives of the town's inhabitants.

Abbey of Santa Maria di Pulsano

On the Pulsano Hill, approximately 9 km from Monte Sant'Angelo, stand the remains of an abbey founded in the 6th century by Pope Gregory the Great. The area was frequented by anchorite and coenobite monks, of both the Eastern and Latin churches. Destroyed by the Saracens, the abbey was rebuilt in the early 12th century, its period of greatest splendour, when it became one of the leading centres spreading the Benedictine monastic culture in Southern Italy and Dalmatia. However, it fell rapidly into decline and spent a long time in obscurity before being suppressed by Napoleon Bonaparte. You can still see the original walls and the entrance to the monastery, a *door* finely decorated with plant motifs. The Romanesque **church** has just a nave, with an apse carved out of a natural cave. The abbey is surrounded by a fascinating landscape of vertical rocks, some 200m high, which attracted many hermits and ascetics over the centuries. This is proven by the ruins of 24 **hermitages** clinging to the rock or in natural caves in sheer rock faces, many of which seem inaccessible.



San Giovanni Rotondo

Monte Sant'Angelo, on the ancient *Via Sacra*, has been visited by pilgrims for centuries but today many travel to San Giovanni Rotondo (566m, pop. 27,202). Its name is inextricably linked to Padre Pio from Pietrelcina, a monk with a unique personality and a gift for preaching who was proclaimed a saint by Pope John Paul II in 2002. Widespread popular devotion to Padre Pio, who spent many years of his life in the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie and died there in 1968, has profoundly changed the face of this small town. It was founded in the 11th century on the site of a prehistoric settlement but millions of visitors now come here every year. It is named probably after the *church of San Giovanni*, known as *the church of the Rotonda*, a round baptistery probably built on the site of a pagan temple dedicated to the cult of the two-headed god Janus. The **mediaeval town centre** features architecture common to the Gargano, some towers built in the old walls

*Padre Pio's cell;
above, abbey of Pulsano*



(partly converted to houses) and interesting churches: the 17th-century church of *Sant'Orsola*, with a *Deposition* by a Venetian painter (16th century), and the church of *San Leonardo*, originally 13th-century but rebuilt in 1678. Other sites worth visiting in the old district are the *Padre Pio Wax Museum*, with reconstructions of the places and people associated with the life of Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, and the *Museo delle Tradizioni, Arti e Mestieri Locali* (*Popular arts and traditions museum*), an ethnographic collection housed in a converted mediaeval tower. Outside the old walls is the church of *Sant'Onofrio* (12th-century).

The church of *Santa Maria delle Grazie* was founded in 1581 and rebuilt in 1676 after an earthquake. This is where Padre Pio ministered to his congregation for many years. Inside, you can still see the confessional where he heard confession and the 17th-century wooden *crucifix* from which he claims to have received the gift of the stigmata. Next to it stands the *sanctuary church of Santa Maria delle Grazie*, consecrated in 1959 and its interior decorated with mosaics (one above the altar is 120 sq m).

San Giovanni Rotondo

The nearby *Capuchin monastery*, founded in the 16th century but rebuilt several times, was home to Padre Pio for 50 years, from the day he arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo in 1916 until his death on 23 September 1968. The simple cell where the monk lived contains the original furniture and decor and a few of his possessions.

The huge **church of San Pio** was designed by Renzo Piano and opened in 2004 to accommodate the millions of pilgrims who come each year to pray at the saint's tomb. With a area of 6,000sqm, the gigantic shell-shaped hall holds up to 10,000 worshippers, while a further 30,000 can attend mass in the square outside, separated from the church only by a large transparent window. The church is on two levels, joined by an oval staircase. A constant stream of pilgrims queues to enter the *lower basilica*, decorated with mosaics by the Slovenian artist Marko Ivan Rup-

Church of San Pio





nik and where the saint's remains are buried. The *upper basilica*, with its magnificent wood and copper roof supported by arches radiating out from behind the altar, contains works by major contemporary artists such as a gilt bronze *cross* above the altar by Arnaldo Pomodoro, a *pulpit* by Giuliano Vaghi and the church's *main door* by Mimmo Paladino.

Another place with strong links to Padre Pio is the **Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza**, a large hospital built in the late 1940s. Next to it, steps lead to the *Stations of the Cross* opened in 1971; surrounded by the vegetation of Mount Castellana, this religious path is peppered with shrines and statues by the sculptor Francesco Messina, who depicted the saint from Pietrelcina in the fifth panel showing Simon of Cyrene helping Christ lift the cross.

*San Marco in Lamis;
opposite page, Santa
Maria di Stignano
facade*



San Marco in Lamis

This fairly large town (550m, pop. 13,910) of low houses with their original balconies and cobbled streets is famous for its gold and silverware. It sits in a broad karst valley surrounded by woodland. Founded around the year 1000, it was a compulsory stop for pilgrims travelling along the *Via Sacra* to Monte Sant'Angelo. Sights worth seeing include *Palazzo Badiale*, now the town hall, and the *Mother Church*, built in the 11th century but remodelled several times. As well as visiting the Pozzatina sinkhole mentioned at the beginning of the itinerary from San Nicandro Garganico, here you can also visit the *Difesa Forest*, a broad area of woodland on the road to Cagnano Varano. In the forest is the *Grotta di Montenero*, a limestone cave more than 100m deep.

On the road to San Severo, approximately 5 km from San Marco in Lamis, is the **sanctuary church of the Madonna di Stignano**, a haven of peace and spirituality. It was built in 1500 on the site of a 13th-century chapel, erected at the location of a miraculous apparition of the Virgin Mary. The *monastery* has grown up around two cloisters, the smaller one



with a pretty portico and loggia, and a Renaissance well. The *church* has a gabled red limestone facade. The area between the Franciscan monastery at Stignano and the ancient site of Castel Pagano, near Apricena, is called the **Valley of the Hermitages** because so many mediaeval ones have been found there, many used until the mid-18th century. These caves and natural shelters, some built in masonry but more often a mixture of the two, were inhabited by anchorite monks and hermits seeking a life of prayer and solitary asceticism. Often situated near holy places and on the pilgrimage route to Monte Sant'Angelo, they also played a supporting role to pilgrims and an important cultural and religious role in the eyes of local farmers and shepherds. The largest and most important was the *Hermitage of St Augustine*, where, despite some subsidence, you can still see the original architectural structures and the remains of frescoes in one of the two chapels.

Monastery of San Matteo at San Marco in Lamis

Another spiritual location near San Marco in Lamis is the **monastery of San Matteo**, documented in 1007, probably founded on a Lombard hospice (6th century) for pilgrims bound for St Michael's Cave. Set in woodland in a panoramic position, it was an important Benedictine monastery. Later, it was taken over by the Cistercians and from 1578, by the Franciscans, who still live there. The *monastery church* contains a 14th-century wooden statue which originally depicted *Christ Giving the Blessing* but was 'transformed' into a *St Matthew* in 1596. Just over a kilometre from the monastery, in the direction of San Giovanni Rotondo, is **Borgo Celano**, a hamlet of San Marco in Lamis, famous because dinosaur foot prints were found in a quarry area. The *Dinosaur Park* and adjacent *Paleontological Museum* go back in time, with footprints left by dinosaurs millions of years ago and a reconstruction of what the environment must have been like then.

Rignano Garganico

The last stop on our itinerary is Rignano Garganico, a small mediaeval town perched on the edge of a plateau. Because of its



position, the town (590m, pop. 2,177) certainly deserves its nickname, the 'balcony of the Gargano'. The views are truly unique, from Lake Lesina to the Bay of Manfredonia and, on clear days, stretching as far as the Murge, Castel del Monte, the Apennines and the distant peaks of Mount Maiella, Gran Sasso and Vulture. The original urban fabric of houses and stone doorways has survived. The castle was built in the 11th century but altered under the Swabians and Angevins. Now, only a single round *tower* remains. Not far away is the *Mother Church*, of mediaeval origin but rebuilt several times. The *Exhibition-Museum* has a collection of local prehistoric finds and Palaeolithic casts. In particular, it has objects from the **Grotta Paglicci**, an important Palaeolithic site just outside the town. In 40 years of excavation, archaeologists have made more than 45,000 finds, dated to 500,000-11,000 years ago: stone tools, graffiti engraved on bone or stone, skeletons, handprints and wall paintings in red-ochre paint of horses.

Rignano Garganico, farmhouse Pescorosso; above, facade detail of the sanctuary church of Santa Maria di Stignano

D R E A M Y B A Y S A N D E M E R A L D - G R E E N S E A



THE TREMITI ISLANDS





Diomede was the ancient name for these islands off the Gargano Peninsula, a name that celebrates the hero from Greek legend, Diomedes, King of Argos, Ulysses' companion in the Trojan War. He was so brave that, in battle, he even dared to challenge Mars, the god of war. According to the legend, after the valiant Achaean warrior had sailed the length and breadth of the Adriatic, he was so smitten by the beauty of these islands that he decided to settle here. He was buried on the island of San Nicola and, to commemorate this seafaring hero, killed by Daunus in a fight, the goddess Aphrodite transformed his companions into large seabirds, known as *diomedee* in Italian, (Manx and Cory's shearwaters), whose haunting calls sound as if they are still lamenting the death of their leader.

Lying about 10 nautical miles off the north Gargano Coast, the **Tremiti archipelago** was settled in Neolithic times. In the Chalcolithic period, it was colonised by the Illyrians from the Balkans. Under the Greeks, it acted as a bridgehead



Rocky landscape in the sea off the Tremiti Islands

for trade with towns in the Gargano, whereas in Roman times, it provided a point of contact with Illyria. It became the seat of an important Benedictine abbey, founded in the 11th century, later run by Cistercian and Lateran communities. Having fallen into decline and been abandoned due to frequent pirate raids, for a long time, the Tremiti were used as a place of deportation, from the Bourbon period to Fascism, for political exiles, like Sandro Pertini, opponents of the regime and common criminals. Even the dialect spoken on the island, which has obvious Neapolitan influences, is the result of forced exile: a group of Neapolitan deportees, exiled here under Ferdinand II of Bourbon in 1843, has resulted in a free population that still speaks this old language. Only after WWII, when the penal colony was finally closed, was the island reborn, essentially as a holiday destination, and the archipelago relaunched and improved.



A marine reserve since 1989 and part of the Gargano National Park, the archipelago consists of five islands: **San Nicola**, the administrative centre and historic capital, **San Domino**, the largest and greenest island, the rugged **Capraia**, **Cretaccio**, little more than a rock, and **Pianosa**, the most remote and difficult to reach, now a special marine reserve. Only the first two are inhabited. They are connected to the mainland by ferry and hydrofoil services operating from Capojale, Rodi Garganico, Peschici and Vieste, but also from Termoli in Molise, and from Vasto and Ortona in Abruzzo. The other islands in the archipelago, a true paradise for divers and marine enthusiasts, can be reached by shuttle services and organised boat trips. No cars are allowed on the Tremiti Islands.

San Nicola

The third-largest island in the archipelago (with a circumnavigation of 3.7 km) is a plateau surrounded by cliffs and escarpments dropping down to the sea and eroded by the wind. Over the centuries, it has been dominated by different peoples – a monastic

The virgin sea of the Tremiti



stronghold and seat of a powerful abbey, a place of devastation and sacking (Slav pirates from Almissa were responsible for the bloodiest episode in 1343), a penal colony and place of exile – from the Imperial Roman period to Fascism. On its south-west tip, **San Nicola di Tremiti** (70m, pop. 486) is a historic town, the archipelago's administrative capital.

A lift takes visitors up to the town from the small port of *Marina*, on the south-west tip of the island. Or you can take the more tiring but interesting option of climbing the long flight of steps leading up to the fortifications, a mighty fortress built between the 13th and 15th centuries. The path passes various features of the fortress and has tantalising views out to sea and along

San Nicola, view of the fortress





its precipitous coastline: the *Tower of the Knights of the Crucifix*, followed by a tunnel with a cross-vaulted ceiling, the *chapel of Santa Maria delle Grazie*, the *Brush Tower*, an old guardhouse where visitors were invited to leave their weapons before entering the town, and the *Cannon Bastion*, used for artillery until the end of WWII. In the town, at the end of Corso Diomede, the *Angevin Tower* marks the beginning of a staircase leading to the abbey of Santa Maria a Mare.

Abbey of Santa Maria a Mare; opposite page: left, wooden polyptych above the high altar; right, Renaissance reliefs on the facade

The splendid **abbey of Santa Maria a Mare**, built by Benedictine monks in 1045 on the site of an early mediaeval building, dominates the island of San Nicola from above. Remodelled many times over the centuries, it incorporates a mixture of harmonious styles, resulting in a true masterpiece of mediaeval art. The beautiful *doorway* in its plain pinkish-white, 15th-century facade is decorated with Corinthian columns. Made in 1473, the scenes depict aspects of monastic life. The





pleasing interior still looks mediaeval and the *floor* is decorated with vast fragments of round polychrome mosaic dating from the 11th and 12th centuries. A 15th-century wooden polyptych by the Venetian School adorns the high altar. Note also the 13th-century painted wooden *Tremiti Cross*, more than 3m high, a fine example of Gothic-Byzantine art. In the left apse is a much venerated wooden statue of *Santa Maria del Mare*, the island's patron saint, which is carried in procession through the streets of the town and out to sea on the Feast of the Assumption (15 August). What remains of the abbey lies beyond the church: a *mediaeval cloister*, with an 18th-century well in the centre with a depiction of Albatross bird, and a Renaissance cloister, the *New Cloister*, of which only the north side survives, decorated with medallions. Off it is the *Lateran dormitory*, named after the last of three monastic communities to live in the abbey. From the balcony it is a sheer drop down to the sea but it has one of the finest views over to the Island of San Domino. Through a doorway and along a tunnel is the tower known as *Knight of St Nicholas*,

Abbey of Santa Maria a Mare, interior

because of its position astride the ‘backbone’ of the island, the last refuge for men with munitions defending the island.

The bare, uninhabited expanse beyond the tower called *the Asinaro plain*, a reference to the fact that donkeys used to graze here, is an important **archaeological site** with numerous ancient finds. You can see the *cistern of St Nicola*, dug out of the rock by the monks to collect rainwater, traces of an Iron-Age *hut* (9th-7th centuries BC) and the remains of a Roman *house* dating from the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD. The *Greek-Roman necropolis*, consisting of rock-cut tombs and caves, is particularly interesting. According to tradition, Giulia, the niece of Augustus, was buried here (she was exiled to the island having been accused of adultery) as too the legendary Diomedes in a tholos tomb. In the north-east of the island is a small, isolated *cemetery*, built by the French in 1806, with magnificent views.

A **boat trip around the island** gives another angle on the island, enabling you to admire its high cliffs, eroded by the waves and the wind, towering above the



emerald-green water. The extraordinary colour of the sea is due to the marne which dissolves when the sea is rough, resulting in reflections that look almost phosphorescent. Sail above the coral reefs and water teeming with fish to get close to many of the marine caves with amazing plays of light, the small, isolated *Mari-nella Beach* near Punta del Cimitero and, on the west coast, the *Grotta della Madonna*, where, according to tradition, the Virgin miraculously appeared to a hermit in the 4th century.

San Domino

Almost all the hotels and restaurants in the Tremiti are concentrated on the largest, greenest island in the archipelago (2.8 km long and 1.7 km wide). Its jagged coastline is extraordinarily scenic, with white cliffs, little bays and coves, caves, rock arches and rock pinnacles sculpted by the sea. For this reason, San Domino is the main destination for tourists, who come here seeking the island’s wild beauty and its beaches. Unlike other islands in the archipelago, it is very fertile, with

San Domino Island, Roselle Bay; above, remains of the abbey cloister; centre, beach of San Nicola Island



many vineyards and olive groves, even a forest of holm oak and Aleppo pine in the south of the island. Because of its luxuriant vegetation and its Mediterranean maquis fragrant with rosemary, myrtle and juniper, it is known as the 'garden of paradise'. Ferries and hydrofoils moor in *Arene Bay*. From here, a road leads through the pine forest to the town (60m) with its houses, shops, restaurants and small hotels. Many villages have produced Neolithic finds, in particular tombs and grave goods.

A **boat trip** round the island offers extraordinary views of its rocky shoreline, and the little bays and coves all around its perimeter. On the east coast, you pass *Arene Bay* near the little harbour, and the island's only sandy beach; *Matano* or *Matauro Bay*, regarded as the most beautiful on the island, overlooked by a house once owned by the singer Lucio Dalla; the *Scoglio dell'Elefante*, a

Cliffs on San Domino Island;
left, San Nicola Island;
above, Selva dei pagliai, San Domino



rock which looks like an elephant waving its trunk seawards; *Roselle Bay*, surrounded by lumps of wild roses; and *Zio Cesare Bay*, on the southernmost tip: a mediaeval wreck was discovered in the sea here with a cargo of marble for the monastery. On the west side is: *Bue Marino Bay*, with a huge rock arch carved by the sea; *Benedettini Bay*, named after the huge water cistern built by the monks; *Ingesi Bay*, a broad bay with rocks sloping down into the sea (site of the Touring Club Italiano holiday resort); next you pass *Tramontana Bay*, *Tonda Bay* and *Tamariello Bay*. The northern tip of the island is *Punta Diamante*: a legend tells of a fabulous diamond hidden in the cracks in the rock. Head back towards the small harbour (Arene Bay) to pass the '*Selva dei pagliai*', pinnacles of rock jutting out of the sea, vaguely reminiscent of haystacks. There are many





beautiful **caves** dotted around its coast. The most interesting ones are *Grotta delle Rondinelle*, between Benedettini Bay and Punta Secca, home to a large colony of common terns; *Grotta del Bue Marino*, near the bay of the same name, where the Monk seal once played; and *Grotta delle Viole*, beyond Punta di Ponente, where the reflections of the water in the early morning turn the rock walls a glorious purple colour.

Cretaccio

More than an actual island, Cretaccio is regarded as the largest rock in the Tremiti Islands. Only 200m from the island of San Domino and 300m from San Nicola, this tiny islet of yellowish clay is constantly buffeted by wind and water. Almost completely devoid of vegetation, it is very small (400m x 200m) and is a half-moon shape with

The largest rock in the Tremiti: Cretaccio Island

a steeply curving bay. Its most interesting feature is *Punta del Diavolo*, a large crack in the rock.

Capraia

The second-largest island in the archipelago (1.6 km long, 600m wide) is completely bare and devoid of vegetation, apart from a few thistles and the occasional lentisk and caper plant, from which its name derives (originally *Capperara*, which later became Capraia). On the north-east tip of the island are a lighthouse and some stone ruins, known as *Casa del Cafone*, once used by shepherds. Although a very hostile environment, the sea is incredibly beautiful, with magnificent swimming and diving, and bays, caves and rocks worn smooth by the wind and sea. Its most charming corners include *Sorrentino Bay*, *Cafone Bay* and *Turchi Bay*, where, in 1567, some Ottoman galleys took shelter. Near *Grande Bay* is the *Grottone*, a huge cave 15m high, and the *Architello*, a rock arch 6m high which has created a natural pool of emerald-green water.



Pianosa

Pianosa, the farthest and most easterly of the Tremiti Islands, almost in international waters, is uninhabited. It is 700m long and 200m wide. Completely bare (except for a few succulents and wild onion bulbs), it sits low down, almost at sea-level (about 15m). It is often submerged during storms, when patches of salt crystals are left on the rocks. Since it is a special marine reserve, all swimming and fishing is strictly forbidden. The only boats allowed to approach the island are those run by organised tours, authorised by the authority that manages the reserve.

Turchi Bay, Capraia Island;
above, lighthouse on Capraia Island

NATURE, CULTURE AND TRADITIONS



A CLOSER LOOK





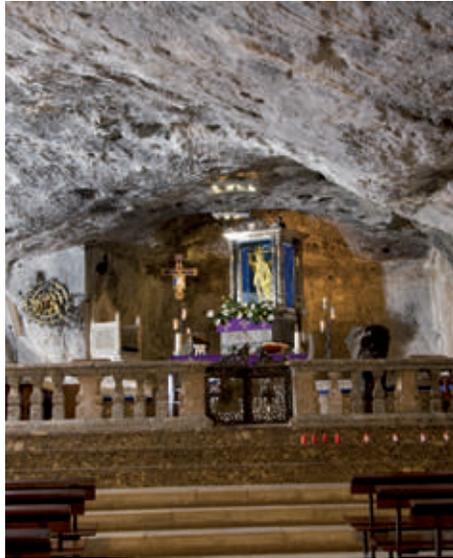
ANCIENT PILGRIMAGE ROUTES

With its wild landscape and extensive woodland, full of rock walls, crevices and caves, the Gargano must have seemed a mysterious, magical place in Antiquity. Already during the Greek colonisation, under the Dauni, this wooded promontory jutting out into the Adriatic was called the 'Sacred Mountain': and many cult sites and necropolises have been found here. The cults of Diomedes, Jupiter and Mithras were all popular, cults of seers like Calchas and Podalirius, and his father Asclepius who was an expert in medicine. There were springs with water that was reputed to be therapeutic, where people practised the rite of incubation. They spent the night in a sacred place wrapped in an animal skin, in the hope of receiving an answer from the god by morning. It was possibly this substratum of spirituality that favoured the spread of Christianity in the Early Middle Ages, when the Gargano became one of the first places to

Monte Sant'Angelo, interior of the sanctuary

accept the new religion. In fact, the old route used by the Crusaders to march from Northern Europe, bound for ships to the Holy Land, passed through this spur of Italy jutting out into the sea. They were following in the footsteps of a monk, Bernard, who had transformed the cave-sanctuary of St Michael into pilgrimage site for Christianity. Indeed, it was the spread of the ancient cult of St Michael that transformed the Gargano into a prayer and pilgrimage area. Once the Arian doctrine had been abandoned, the Lombards saw the archangel depicted with a shield and a sword as a Christian interpretation of their warrior god Wotan. The area also became an important stop on a journey of redemption known as '*Homo, Angelus, Deus*', (Man, Angel, God) which involved visiting the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome, the tomb of St James at Santiago de Compostela in Spain (*Homo*), the sanctuary church of St Michael in the Gargano (*Angelus*) and the sacred sites in the Holy Land (*Deus*).

To begin with, they were difficult journeys along unpaved drove roads. As the pil-



grims moving up from the area known as the Capitanata towards the Gargano massif to worship at the cave of the saint increased, two main routes developed, known as the *Via Sacra Micaelica*: the first climbed from Siponto, near Mandredonia, along valleys and footpaths gouged out of the rock; the other led to the cave following the gap that cuts the Gargano in two, from the Stignano Valley, near San Marco in Lamis, to the Carbonara Valley below Monte Sant'Angelo. When Lombard rule was consolidated under Liutprand (712-744), guard-rooms, hospices and oratories were added to the road network at regular intervals. Around the year 1000, the number of pilgrims winding their way along the plateau increased dramatically. Many visited local hermitages and small monasteries, the first cells of what was to become a widespread and important monastic presence in the area. Under the Normans and the Swabians, churches, sanctuaries, fortified abbeys and monas-

*Modern-day pilgrims;
above, St Michael's Cave*



teries appeared, leaving traces still visible today in towns and remote abbeys.

If you wish to explore the most interesting places on the old Via Sacra, you could start at the **abbey of San Leonardo di Siponto**, on the main road between Foggia and Manfredonia. This site was in ancient *Sipontum*, an important Daunian city, later a Roman colony. It disappeared in the 13th century as a result of a series of natural disasters and the fact that the area was gradually turning into a marsh. A splendid example of Apulian Romanesque, the church, founded between the 11th and 12th centuries, was an important stopping-place for knights, crusaders and pilgrims bound for Monte Sant'Angelo. Its beautiful doorway, decorated with magnificent carvings, possibly Swabian in date, is supported by two lions bearing columns. The interior, still original, contains frescoes with crossed shields, reminding us that the Teutonic Knights lived in the monastery between 1262 and 1480. Every year, on 21 June, at the summer solstice, a beam of light passes through a hole in the roof of the church, and lights up the cross

San Leonardo di Siponto, lunette

carved on the floor of the basilica between the two pillars of the side-entrance.

A few kilometres before Manfredonia stands the **basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore di Siponto**, erected in the first decades of the 12th century. This was the cathedral of the old Daunian town, the remains of which can be seen in the nearby archaeological site. The church is built on a square plan, with obvious Eastern influences in the blind arches which enclose its tiny lozenge-shaped windows and rhombus-shaped decoration. Its 13th-century carved doorway merits special attention and, inside, the altar: a magnificent early-Christian sarcophagus.

San Marco in Lamis was a stop for pilgrims moving from the Tavoliere up towards Monte Sant'Angelo. From here, you can access the **sanctuary church of the Madonna di Stignano**, on the San Severo road. The church dates from 1500, but was erected on the site of an earlier chapel, mentioned in a document of 1231, where,

Santa Maria Maggiore di Siponto





according to popular tradition, the Virgin Mary had miraculously appeared. Next to it is an old monastery, built around two cloisters. We know that there were many anchorite monks in the Stignano Valley because of the dense network of *hermitages* and *monasteries*, often located in caves or clefts in the rock. Inhabited from the Middle Ages until the 18th century, they played an important role assisting pilgrims bound for the sanctuary church of San Michele Arcangelo, but were also welcomed by local farmers and shepherds. Surrounded by woodland, not far from San Marco in Lamis, the **monastery of San Matteo** – originally dedicated to St John the Baptist – was built probably in the Lombard period (6th century) as a hospice for pilgrims on their way to the holy cave of St Michael. Having become an important and wealthy Benedictine abbey, in 1311 it passed into the hands of Cistercian monks and, in 1578, was taken over by the Franciscans, who dedicated it to St Matthew and still live there today.

Seven kilometres south-west of Monte Sant'Angelo, Pulsano Hill was a mystic

Monastery of San Matteo

place frequented by monks, anchorites, and Eastern and Latin coenobites. In its natural clefts and high rock walls, lived a community of hermits who had taken a vow to lead a life of silence and meditation. According to tradition, in the 6th century Pope Gregory the Great built the first section of the abbey, probably a hermitage, which was destroyed by Saracen pirates but rebuilt in the early 12th century. The walls and the entrance to the monastery belong to the original building and its doorway is decorated with plant motifs; part of the church has been hewn out of the natural rock. Around the abbey are the remains of one Apulia's important monastic sites: the **hermitages of Pulsano**, which came top in the 2010 'Places of the Heart' census organised by the FAI. Made out of natural caves overlooking a sheer drop down onto silent canyons or built on apparently inaccessible spurs of grey rock, for centuries they were home to anchorites and hermits. Connected by steep paths and flights of rock-cut steps, and supplied with water thanks to a series



of channels gouged out of the rock, these cells formed a sort of isolated and difficult to access village, with places for communal activities, prayer and work. This was the last stop, prelude to the sight of the **sanctuary church of San Michele Arcangelo**, the oldest and most important sanctuary dedicated to the Archangel St Michael in the West. According to tradition, the Church was dedicated to the Archangel Michael in 493 by Lorenzo Maiorano, Bishop of Siponto. However, the earliest buildings were the two crypts of the late 7th and early 8th centuries. The figure of the warrior saint can be seen in the sanctuary today in a white marble statue attributed to the Sansovino school (early 16th century) and in a venerated gilt copper icon of St Michael, now in the Museo Devozionale. From Monte Sant'Angelo, the pilgrims continued to St Nicholas' tomb in Bari, and on to Brindisi to catch ships to the Holy Land.

Monte Sant'Angelo, detail from the facade of the sanctuary church; above, Pulsano abbey and, centre, a monk



THE ANCIENT TRATTURI

Transhumance, the seasonal migration of flocks and herds from their summer pastures in hills and mountains to their grazing pastures in the plain in autumn, is very old indeed. Shepherds used to move their animals for days at a time, walking beside them along traditional drove roads, the *tratturi*, broad grassy paths with shelters and enclosures where the animals could rest, but also inns, taverns, churches and oratories for the men accompanying them. It was a long, tiring journey from the mountains of Abruzzo and Molise to the rich pastures of the Tavoliere, with further branches leading down to the Murge and the Gargano. And, in the spring, they walked back in the opposite direction, moving flocks and herds from the grazing lands near the sea back to the mountain pastures. A vast phenomenon in past centuries, involving

Grazing land near Monte Sant'Angelo



enormous numbers of men and animals, which had a major impact on the economy of these lands. It has been calculated that, in about the mid-15th century, 30,000 shepherds and no less than three million sheep used to make the journey along the *tratturi* every year. By the 17th century, the number had grown to five and a half million. It was so fundamental to the local economy that, under the Kingdom of Naples, two special customs institutions were created to control it, called the 'Doganella d'Abruzzo' and the 'Regia Dogana della Mena delle Pecore di Foggia'.

Although still practised widely until the mid-20th century, today, transhumance has

Goats at Mattinata; above, meadows for grazing





been almost completely replaced by vans and trucks which transport the animals to and fro. But this millenary ritual is still practised in the Gargano, especially in the thousands of hectares of grazing land (almost all owned by the State) within the perimeter of the National Park. In the old days, transhumance in the Gargano involved moving herds and flocks from the plain up to the mountains on small drove roads, yet preserving features and organisation very similar to those of the huge transhumance to and from Abruzzo and Molise. A journey thousands of years old which, today, still brings farmers and their cattle from the coastal plains to the grazing land of the hinterland, surrounded by woodland. Once upon a time, in the Gargano, there were more sheep than anything else: the men folk of **San Giovanni Rotondo** had a reputation for being the best shepherds. But there were sheep farms everywhere, at **San Marco in Lamis**, **Apricena**, **Rignano Garganico**, **San Nicandro Garganico**, **Carpino**, **Cagnano Varano**... there were also many



Podolica cattle indigenous to the Gargano; left, goats grazing



flocks of black Gargano goats. Today, however, the ancient practice of transhumance no longer involves sheep and goats and there are now far fewer of them in the Gargano: the emphasis now is on cattle. Rearing the Gargano Podolica breed goes perfectly with the traditional rites of transhumance, because, even today, the cattle are still left to graze freely. It is thanks to this very natural kind of farming that the Podolica cattle of the Gargano produce such tasty, healthy meat, full of minerals. Their milk is used to make excellent cheese, such as the famous *caciocavallo podolico*, a Slow Food presidium, which matures incredibly well, enhancing the flavours of freshly-cut grass and wild flowers. These rustic animals, with a straight profile, broad horns and a characteristic grey coat, adapt well to harsh environmental conditions, grazing on poor soil and in shrubland.



THE COASTAL WATCHTOWERS

Driving along the winding, jagged Gargano Coast, it is not unusual to see old buildings shaped like a truncated pyramid, about 10m high, with slightly sloping walls and narrow windows. They belonged a lookout and signalling system implemented under the Spanish viceroys in 1532 in order to limit the threat of Saracen pirates who plagued the coast with frequent incursions and raids. That is why they are often called ‘*Saracen towers*’. Unlike other similar structures in Southern Italy, the Gargano coastal towers were not built to defend the land from the Turks. If danger was sighted, their only purpose was to raise the alarm. They were rather small containing only one room on the first floor, and were accessed by wooden ladders which could be pulled up, later replaced by stone-built ramps on the landward side. Their sighting purpose is confirmed by their location: they

A bay on the Gargano Coast



always rise up overlooking the sea, on the beach, or above a sheer drop, on spurs of rock or small panoramic promontories. Furthermore, each one had to be within sight of other two towers, in order to quickly signal the danger and raise the alarm: by ringing a bell, reflecting sunlight with mirrors or making smoke signals. At night, fire signals were used. Today the towers are an integral part of the Gargano landscape, one of its most original and typical features, enough to devise a specific itinerary to see the most interesting ones.

The imposing **Fortore Tower**, restored several times, is situated between the river of the same name and Lake Lesina, and looks like a fortress. Built between 1485 and 1540, in the classic truncated



Tower at Vieste; above, San Felice Arch



pyramid shape, it has an access ramp on the wall facing inland; the wall facing the sea, exposed to danger, is blind. On a cliff about 2 km from the mouth of the Capoiale Canal, a canal connecting Lake Varano to the sea, lie the remains of the **Cala Rossa Tower**, named after the reddish colour of the iron-bearing rocks on which it stands. Built in 1569, it was a vital link in the coastal signalling system along with the nearby **Mileto Tower**, located on a small spur of rock between the lagoon lakes of Lesina and Varano.

The oldest watch towers in the Gargano probably date from the late 13th century. They are located near the eastern canal linking Lake Varano to the sea. The **Varano Grande** and **Varano Piccola towers** feature an older style of architecture, with a round base and Ghibelline merlons on a crenellated top. There are two towers near Rodi Garganico: one is the **Sanzone Tower**, west of the town, near the Lido del Sole; the other has been incorporated into the **bell tower** of

the church of *San Nicola di Mira* in the old town centre. On the coast between Rodi and Peschici stands the **Preposti Tower**, one of the most imposing lookout towers of the whole Gargano. The tower, situated not far from the famous beach of San Menaio, was built in the 16th century to defend an easily accessible section of the coast.

Famous for its breath-taking views, the **Monte Pucci Tower** stands – on the shoreline between San Menaio and Peschici – above a sheer drop over the sea. The small tower overlooks the plains of Calenella and Padula, with the harbour and town of Peschici on the promontory to the east; to the west, the long beach of San Menaio and Rodi Garganico are visible in the distance. On a really clear day you can even see the Tremiti Islands, the massifs of Abruzzo and the islands of Dalmatia.

Two other watchtowers stand near Peschici: to the north-west, on a low rocky promontory overlooking the bay of Peschici, lie the romantic ruins of the **Sfinale Tower**, while, to the east, between the rocky coastline of Sfinale and the Cala Lun-



ga promontory stands the **Usmai Tower**, with its typical truncated pyramid shape. The jagged coastline east of Peschici hosts the **Cala Lunga Tower**, besieged and destroyed by the Saracens in 1570 but subsequently rebuilt due to its strategic position.

The coast around Vieste, with its rocky promontories and high cliffs, still preserves many Saracen towers, some of which are now in ruins. The **Porticello Tower** stands not far from the town, on a low, rocky promontory between the beaches of Scialmarino and San Lorenzo. The **Ponte Tower**, now in ruins, was built to defend the beach of Castello, the **Campi Tower** overlooks the bay of the same name on a small rocky promontory, the **Porto Greco Tower** or **Aglio Tower** on a rock with a sheer drop down to the sea, surrounded by pine-forest and Mediterranean maquis, the **Gattarella Tower** situated within sight of the **Porto-nuovo Tower** further north and the **San Felice Tower**, one of the finest and

Sfinalicchio Tower between Peschici and Vieste; above, the Monte Pucci Tower





most photographed towers in the whole Gargano. In 1946, the easternmost lighthouse in Italy was built on the site of an existing 16th-century watchtower, above the bay of Pergola: the **Preposti Tower**, also known as **Pugnochiuso Tower** and located in the residential holiday complex of the same name, built by the ENI company in the 1960s.

On the long stretch of coastline between Pugnochiuso and Manfredonia are sporadic the watchtowers because have been dismantled over the centuries. There are only the ruins of the **Monte Barone Tower**, just before Mattinata, the **Porto Tower**, overlooked by the buildings and tourist facilities of Mattinata, the **Pozzillo Tower** in the Plain, and the **Monte Saraceno Tower**, which was turned into a gun battery during WWI.

San Felice Arch; left, the Gattarella Tower and the trabucco at Porticello

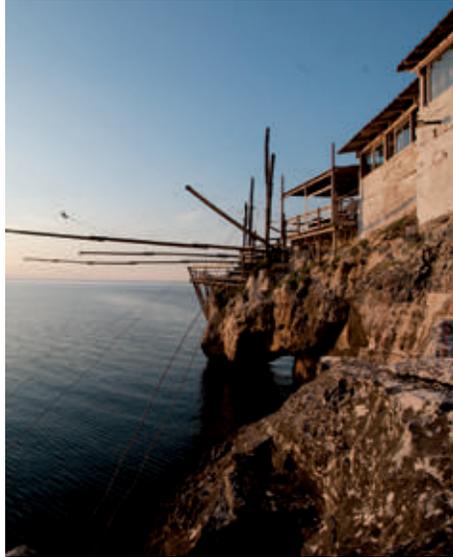


THE TRABUCCHI, TRADITIONAL FISHING DEVICES

They look like gigantic spiders, their long legs dangling above the sea, tenaciously clinging to the tips of promontories and cliffs. They can withstand the might of the waves and the chilly blasts of the north-west wind. These are the *trabucchi*, ancient fishing devices, a familiar sight on the Gargano coastline even today. Unlike those on the coast of Abruzzo and Molise, the Gargano *trabucchi* are not supported by stilts, instead they are anchored to the rock by huge trunks of Aleppo pine. The same wood is used to build the *platform* and the long arms hovering several metres above the water, known as *antennae*, which support the *trabocchetto*, a large fine mesh net. The huge presence of Aleppo pines in the area was no doubt a decisive factor, in the choice, providing plenty of raw material with which to build these

The trabucco silhouette poised above the sea

impressive machines. But not only that: this wood is resistant to the salty air, easy to shape and very flexible, so it can face up to violent storms and the strong north-west wind. Fishing on a *trabucco* can only be done when fish is sighted. When the lookout sees a shoal of fish approaching, the net is lowered into the sea using a complex system of ropes and pulleys, and a huge hand-operated winch. The net is then raised in the same way to simply collect the fish. The 'antennae', which extend above the sea for at least 40 metres, act as levers, raising and lowering the huge net during the many fishing sessions. For centuries, the Gargano people have fished in this way, successfully exploiting the bays and the currents along the coast, without the bother or the risk of going to sea. Traditional *trabucchi* were widely used until the 1940s, when they were gradually replaced by modern fishing boats and abandoned. They stayed where they were, silent features of the landscape, like the bare skeletons of sea monsters. To-



day some *trabucchi* devices have a new life. Some have been revived in order to preserve the old fishing traditions, others have been converted into romantic restaurants serving freshly caught fish, illuminated at night by a clever play of lights that makes them look like weird contemporary sculptures. The Regional Law passed on 27 January 2015 acknowledges the Gargano *trabucchi* as part of the region's heritage, adding them to the list of historical and environmental assets that need protecting. This major step forward will lead to a careful census of the existing structures. Eventually it will result in a plan to restore, conserve and promote this traditional form of fishing as an integral part of the coastal landscape. Numerous *trabucchi* are to be found in the area between Peschici and Vieste. One of them, known as the *Monte Pucci trabucco*, stand on the coast west of **Peschici**, clinging to the Mount Pucci promontory.

*The Sfinale trabucco;
above, the Monte Pucci trabucco*



East of the town, on the rocky spikes of the beautiful San Nicola Bay, is the *San Nicola trabucco* built on a low coastline. More of these typical fishing devices can be found further along the jagged coast, wonderfully poised between rocks and sea: the *Manaccora trabucco*, clinging to a narrow headland separating the beaches of San Nicola and Manaccora, the *Cala Lunga trabucco*, the little *Punta Usmai trabucco* near the Saracen Tower with the same name, and the *Forcichella trabucco* on a round headland about 8 km east of the town. Continuing towards Vieste, the *trabucco* of *La Chianca Island* stands right opposite the famous beach of Scialmarino. East of the beach is the Porticello Peninsula, site of the *Porticello* or *Scialmarino trabucco* and the *Tufara trabucco*. More fishing devices are to be found on spurs of rock along the next section of jagged coastline: the *Molinella trabucco*, the *Punta Lunga trabucco* and, by now quite close to **Vieste**, the *San Lorenzo trabucco*, on the promontory at the end of San Lorenzo beach. Near the harbour of this charming little town is the *Harbour trabucco*, now

San Nicola trabucco



a popular tourist attraction. Behind the monastery of San Francesco is the more than a century old *San Francesco trabucco*, regarded as one of the oldest in the whole Gargano. There is not much left of the many *trabucchi* that once populated the coast south of Vieste, which is more winding and precipitous, since they have been abandoned to their fate. However, you can still see the *Punta La Testa trabucco*, hanging onto the headland that marks the easternmost point of the Gargano. Here, in a landscape of rocks and sea, surrounded by old Aleppo pines and immersed in the sweet smell of the Mediterranean maquis, the scenery is wild and wonderful in any season of the year.

Molinella trabucco;
above, trabucco of La Chianca island





THE BEACHES AND SEA CAVES

Long and splendid sandy beaches with tiny coves hidden by high cliffs, and bathing facilities for people who like comfort, and solitary little beaches that can only be accessed by boat or by steep, winding footpaths. And then, rocky headlands hugging crescent-shaped bays, white sea stacks rising out of the sea, majestic rock arches, and sea caves brimming with reflections. Modern tourist resorts have not wiped out the wilder corners of the Gargano, still shrouded in the wonderful smells of the Mediterranean maquis and echoing with the endless chirping of cicadas. People who adore the sea and windsurfers will love the Gargano, with its more than 200 km of coastline, crystal-clear water and some of the most beautiful headlands in the Mediterranean.

Rock arches and white cliffs

In such fascinating, varied scenery, made up of light and contrasts, strong colours and heavy perfumes, everyone can find their own 'special place', the one that strikes the deepest chord. So it is hard to draw up a list of the loveliest places to see, because everyone will choose differently, maybe a remote corner that few others know about. However some beaches have been universally proclaimed the finest in Italy, for the purity of the water, the fineness of the sand and the beauty of the surrounding landscape. There are almost no state concessions on **Varano Island Beach**, the thin strip of land separating Lake Varano from the sea. It can be reached by footpaths leading through the pine forest and the maquis of the *Varano Island Nature Reserve*. A long beach of fine sand stretches from Foce Varano (a small canal between the lake and the sea) to the boundary of the territory of Rodi Garganico: **Foce Varano Beach**,

A section of the coastline near Vieste





with its restaurants and recreational facilities. At Rodi Garganico, **Ponente Beach**, stretching westwards as far as *Lido del Sole*, is ideal for families with kids. **Levante Beach**, on the other hand, has fine golden sand sloping gently down into the sea. All around lie the sweet-smelling citrus plantations which have made this area famous. Near the long *San Menaio Beach* with its excellent tourist facilities is **Calenella Bay**, a broad beach of soft sand, fringed by green fields. A few kilometres from Peschici in the direction of Vieste is **Zaiana Beach**, unusual because of the tiny patches of sand tucked away among reefs and little headlands. Especially popular with youngsters, it is accessed by a staircase that winds down through the maquis.

At **Manaccora Beach**, the fine sand slopes gently into the sea. The beach is situated between two charming rocky promontories and is regarded by many as the finest in Peschici. On the stretch of coast between this town and Vieste,

fringed with cliffs and pine-forests, **Cala Lunga Beach** is famous for its incredibly clear water. From here you can also access the charming **Cala del Turco Bay**, whose name reminds us of the Saracen pirates that plagued the coast for centuries.

Still wild and unspoilt, **San Felice Bay** is famous for its pure water, for the *Architiello*, a natural white arch gouged out of the rock by the sea, and for its interesting caves, the *Grotta dei Marmi* and the *Grotta delle Viole*, whose water throws up a myriad reflections. Another natural treasure is the beach at **Sanguinara Bay**, tucked in between high limestone cliffs and old Aleppo pines. It can easily be reached by boat or by a footpath through the pine forest. There are many caves on this coast section. The better way to visit them is by boat from the harbour at Vieste. Some of the better known caves are *Grotta dei Pomodori*, *Grotta Sfondata*, *Grotta dei Due Occhi* and the *Grotta della Tavolozza*, whose name (meaning palette), refers to the amazing colours of its rock walls.

A rough track leads through the maquis down to the gravel **beach of Porto Greco**, once a haven for sailors in windy or



stormy weather. Soft golden sand, crystal-clear water and a sandy bottom with a gentle slope: **Colombi Beach** can easily be reached from the Vieste coast road. It was named after the huge *Grotta dei Colombi*, which provides shade and shelter to swimmers in the hottest hours of the day. On the reef is an old *trabucco* for fishing. The famous **Pizzomunno Beach**, with its regimented rows of parasols is one of the loveliest on the coast around Vieste. Its name refers to the white rock more than 25m high which stands on the shoreline and has become a symbol of the little town. Certainly less well-known, partly because it is only accessible from the sea or through the holiday resort behind it, the little **beach of Porto Piatto** has managed to conserve its wild charm. A beach of gravel mixed with sand, it is especially popular with divers and snorkelers on account of its crystal-clear water and the many caves hidden in the cliffs. The most impressive of them is the more than 40m high *Grotta Campana Grande*.

Grotta dei Due Occhi; above, *San Felice Bay*;
centre, *Grotta Sfondata*



Not far away is *Grotta Smeraldo*, also known as *Grotta dei Pipistrelli* for its large colony of bats. Other interesting caves can be found beyond the famous **Pugnochiuso Bay**, where one of the very first holiday resorts was established. They include *Grotta della Pergola* and *Grotta Calda*, so called because of the high temperature inside the cave. Another famous cave is *Grotta Rossa* or *Grotta dell'occhio Magico*, where a narrow corridor opens up into a large chamber, with a pool of incredibly blue water and a tiny beach, lit by a small crevice in the rock.

On the main road leading from Vieste to Mattinata lies **Vignanotica Beach**, an endless expanse of tiny round pebbles. Surrounded by high, dazzlingly white cliffs with darker stripes of flint, the water here is deep with a gravel bottom. A footpath leads through the maquis to the beach. One of the most famous beaches in the Gargano is at **Zagare Bay** near Mattinata, also known as **Mergoli Bay**. Fringed by high, spectacularly white cliffs, dotted with reefs,



little coves and caves, this is Nature and the sea at their best. Fashioned by the wind and the sea, the two rock stacks rising up from the fabulously clear water are called the *Finestrella dei Sogni* (Window of Dreams) and the *Arco di Diomede* (Arch of Diomedes). The sand on the beach and the sea floor is soft and pale, while the water has shades of turquoise and emerald. The two names for the beach come from the orange blossom (*zagare*) of the nearby orange groves and the fact that blue rock thrushes (called *mergoli* locally) dwell here.

Mattinatella Beach, also called *Fontana delle Rose Beach*, also extends into the Mattinata area. They are actually two different beaches separated by a rocky spur: the one to the north, accessible by boat, is a paradise for people who prefer peace and quiet; the second is well-equipped with tourist facilities. Both are white gravel beaches with blue water fringed by vegetation.

The beaches at Vignanotica and, right, at Pizzomunno



The **Tremiti Islands** are a case apart. A protected marine reserve since 1989, the islands have been part of the Gargano National Park since 1996. Here the sea is the overriding attraction. The deep, rocky coral beds, the extraordinarily clear water, and the wealth of marine flora and fauna make the archipelago a true paradise for divers. Around San Domino Island, among fields of Neptune grass and colonies of *Gorgoniidae*, expert divers can even explore old wrecks.

Near *Punta di Ponente*, at a depth of about 25m, lie the remains of a 1st-century BC Roman ship with a cargo of amphoras. Off *Zio Cesare Bay*, at a depth of about 20m, is the wreck of a mediaeval ship carrying marble for the San Nicola abbey. Off *Inglesi Bay*, at a depth of about 30m, is the wreck of paddle-boat, used by Garibaldi in the expedition of The Thousand. It sank four years later while taking prisoners to Manfredonia.

*Zagare Bay; opposite
page the high coastline
of San Domino Island*





LOCAL FESTIVALS AND TRADITIONS

The Gargano is a spiritual land, a place of pilgrimage and prayer since ancient times. Its religious history is profoundly rooted in its towns, as a distinctive trait of its own identity. Over the past 50 years, of course, huge changes have altered the local economy and the very lifestyles of the inhabitants, partly lessening this peculiarity and mitigating its original character of being a world apart, a sort of island within Apulia. And yet, despite the end of a centuries-old splendid isolation, caused firstly by flows of migrants to the industrialized North, and then by hordes of tourists drawn by its beautiful beaches and scenery, the Gargano has managed to preserve its ancient traditions. Proof lies in the extraordinary religious festivals still celebrated on particular occasions, heart-felt moments of spirituality and prayer but, above all, op-

Crucifix in Lake Varano

opportunities for reinforcing the strong cultural identity shared by its people.

One of the most interesting festivals is the *procession of the Holy Cross* in Varano, held each year on 23 April to commemorate a miracle that happened in 1717: according to local tradition, a long and terrible drought hit the countryside, devastating the crops and bringing famine to the land. Seeking divine intervention, the people organised a solemn procession to take the 14th-century crucifix kept in the *church of the Santissima Annunziata* to the eastern end of **Lake Varano**. Their prayers were met with torrential rain and the fields became fertile again. Since then, the procession has been repeated each year and is attended by all the local faithful. Accompanied by prayers and hymns, the huge wooden Crucifix is carried up to the top of a hill, where a small *Calvary* overlooks the fields and the lagoon.

Another highlight in the local religious life is the *festival of Santa Maria di Merino*, held in **Vieste** on 9 May. A wooden stat-



ue of the Virgin, the town's patron saint along with St George, is carried in procession from the *cathedral* where it is kept, along the town streets to the *little church of Santa Maria di Merino*, near Scialmarino Beach. Tradition tells that the revered statue was once a beautiful ship's figure-head, found by some sailors on this very beach after a shipwreck. It may even have belonged to the loot from one of the many Saracen ships that came from the East to raid the Gargano Coast. The sacred statue is carried for more than 7 km, from the town centre to the sanctuary. On the way, the statue faces the sea while, on the return journey, it faces the fields, in order to equally bless the inhabitants' two main sources of income – the sea and the fields. Another traditional festival is held for St George, the town's other patron saint, on 23 April. As well as carrying around the saint's statue, with the town guilds' ban-

Vico del Gargano, a balcony with citrus branches for the festival of San Valentino; above, Rignano Garganico, statue of the Madonna of Christ



ners and costumes, the *festival of San Giorgio* involves a horse race on Pizzomunno Beach, commemorating the achievements of this knight turned saint.

The *festival of Santa Maria della Luce*, patron saint of **Mattinata**, lasts three days, from 14 to 16 September. Extraordinarily elaborate decorative lights form intricate arches over the streets, while the town hosts concerts and musical processions. A 17th-century painting of the Virgin is carried along with the wooden statues of St Anthony and the Archangel St Michael on the last day of the festival, which ends with a spectacular firework display.

Patron saint's festivals involve processions of statues through town streets all over the Gargano: the *festival of the Madonna del Carmine* at **Vico del Gargano**, the *festival of San Eustachio* at **Ischitella**, the *festival of patron saints and the Immacolata* at **San Nicandro Garganico**, the *festival of Madonna della Libera* at **Rodi Garganico**, the *festival of San Giovanni Battista* at **San Giovanni Rotondo**... The *festival of Sant'Elia*, which takes place at **Peschici**

San Valentino, Vico del Gargano

from 19 to 21 July deserves special attention. The legend goes that, in the 16th century, thanks to prayers offered to the prophet saint Elijah, the town and the surrounding countryside were miraculously saved from a terrible plague of locusts that was destroying all the crops. This important festival, where the religious ceremony is accompanied by concerts and culinary events, ends with a magnificent firework display over the sea.

The *festival of Santa Maria al Mare*, patron saint of the Tremiti Islands, is really exciting. At **San Nicola**, on 15 August, feast of the Assumption, a wooden statue of the Virgin is processed through the town streets. It is later transferred to a beautifully decorated fishing-boat, which sets out to sea followed by boats full of the faithful, local fishermen and tourists. A mass is celebrated on board near Cala dei Turchi Bay, and a crown of flowers is thrown into the sea. The day ends with an amazing firework display seen from all over the archipelago. **Monte**

Statue of St Michael in the procession of Monte Sant'Angelo





Sant'Angelo dedicates two festivals to its patron saint: on 8 May, anniversary of the archangel's first appearance in the cave, and on 29 September, when according to tradition the Bishop of Siponto consecrated the site dedicated to St Michael. But the most curious and interesting festival is held on 14 and 15 February at **Vico del Gargano**, in honour of its patron saint, St Valentine. The saint's statue is carried in procession, with oranges and lemons from local citrus groves, while squares, houses, alleyways and balconies are decorated with sweet-smelling garlands of fruits. According to local tradition, the juice from these fruits is allegedly turned by magic into a sort of love potion, strengthening every relationship. Couples in love flock here for the *festival of San Valentino* and declare eternal love to each other in the narrow and very romantic Vicolo del Bacio (Lane of the Kiss). In the Gargano, not to forget the many religious ceremonies that are held

Rodi Garganico, procession of the Madonna della Libera with the venerated Byzantine icon



during Easter week, such as the *Good Friday procession* at **Vico del Gargano** and the *procession of the Dead Christ* at **Monte Sant'Angelo**. Perhaps the most memorable is the old *procession of the 'fracchie'* at **San Marco in Lamis**, a religious event held on Good Friday. A statue of Our Lady of Sorrows is processed through town accompanied by the '*fracchie*', huge carved tree trunks weighing several hundred kilos, which are filled with thin branches, lit and pulled along like gigantic torches.

Procession of the fracchie, San Marco in Lamis;
above, statue of St Michael during the
procession dedicated to the saint





THE GARGANO AS SEEN BY WRITERS

“I thought of a wild, dark and rugged mountain, much like a gorge; what I found was one of Italy’s most Greek-like lands, soft and pretty. Favoured by the season, I saw a gentle, flower-filled landscape as encountered in the most lyrical Greek poets; almond trees half white with blossom and half green with leaves, slopes covered with wild purple irises and clumps of twisted olive trees on rocks. Even the villages with their low lime-rendered houses were luminously clean: donkeys, mules, sheep and black goats passing by them stood out against that white, on their way to drink from marble fountains worthy of any romantic poem; an abundance of poor villages that were, until yesterday, isolated from the world [...]. Soft is also the so-called Umbra forest, who knows whether in memory of the Umbri, an ancient local people, or simply for its shade; set high on the mountain, it is all

Landscape of Peschici

that remains of the forests that covered the headland. Mainly pale beech, it is also home to holly and poisonous yew; it is populated with birds, thick but free from horrors." This is how the Gargano appeared to Guido Piovene in his unforgettable *Viaggio in Italia*, published in 1957. His words still convey all the magic and poetry of a timeless place, a seemingly suspended, archaic and radiant landscape. D'Annunzio's poem *The Shepherds* contains what is, perhaps, the loveliest ever description of the Gargano, "the untamed Adriatic, its brine as green as pastures in the mountains."

Certainly, the changes have been radical and irreversible in recent decades. The force of tourism has changed the scenery along the coast and a different economy, forgoing traditional farming methods, has also left clear signs inland. Yet that ancient soft and pretty air that took Piovene aback lives on.

The writer Riccardo Bacchelli from Bologna had encountered the Gargano years earlier, as a guest in San Marco in Lamis of his friend Giustiniano Serrilli, "the humanist tanned by the sun". That stay spawned a



number of articles published by the Turin daily newspaper *La Stampa* in the spring of 1929 and later collected in the book *Italia per terra e per mare* (1952). Bacchelli travelled the roads and visited the towns of an ageless Gargano. One road "deserted, solemn and accompanied by views of the sea" took him to Vieste, "its name as light and delicate as a first kiss with parted lips." Dazzlingly radiant, it appeared to him "atop a rock dropping into the sea, white, Moorish and marine; its indolence like that of a beautiful woman, sultrily fatigued after swimming and who has lain down on a bed of rock to sunbathe as the waves kiss her feet." He saw the coastal towers and the *trabucchi* dotting the coastline: "the long arms, delicate structures and rigging of the great winch nets all trembling in the cool breeze as they protrude into the fish-filled Adriatic from the rocks near every coastal town (...) There are seagulls everywhere just as everywhere its history speaks of earthquakes and Saracen ruins, of Dalmatian

A flying seagull;
above, a typical alley in Peschici



pirates and of beastly Turks, in these towns to which the sea brings as much peace today as it did war in times past." He visited Peschici, "the poorest of towns with no water, huddled on the rock", where some people still lived in homes hewn into the soft rock. Another aspect of it struck him: "Oh, Peschici is known as the town with the most beautiful girls of the Gargano. And they must be truly beautiful, judging by what I happened to see while passing through. Adorned with necklaces and huge earrings in old filigree, veiled with handkerchiefs or shawls, industrious and rested..." He saw Vico, "the regional gateway to the great inland forests", Ischitella, "sunny and with good walls", Carpino "white on the great green plain", Cagnano and the Lake Varano. "In the meadows and fields, darker, in the rocks and mountains, in the colour of the sea and the pale olive groves, there is a gravity, a melancholy that is fitting and revealed at sunset." He was beguiled by Rodi's landscape of citrus groves: "They say that so sweet is the fragrance of the or-

Vieste, Punta San Francesco;
opposite page: left, Cagnano Varano;
right, an ancient olive tree





ange groves on the lido of Rodi Garganico that it brings tears to the eyes at the time of blossom. Orange and lemon groves fill all the valleys and adorn every hill on that coastline, where chuckling springs of water appear to nurture them. To protect the delicate blossom and heavy fruit against the excesses of the Bora wind, the farmers have – with thoughtful and painstaking science – erected espaliers and rows of ilex and laurel hedges. So, with dense foliage doing honour to their military and poetic virtues, the farmers ward off its passage, break the flurries and gulfs, in short they thwart the ruinous play of the wind.”

“I like the Gargano. – wrote Roberto Rossetti in 1961 – It is so silent, or rather so solitary. Not a land abandoned but one yet to be explored. Ever curving roads brush past slopes filled with twisted, dark olive trees, as shrivelled as Uncle Rigo’s hands; and the dark green, that dark green, is as solemn as a Greek poem, intimidating.” Alfonso Gatto lauds the coastline between Vieste and Manfredonia in *Ex Voto* (1962): “From Vieste to Manfredonia the road rises and falls through shady

A Vieste view

forest and brightly lit horizon, in an almost total solitude broken here and there by the presence of a woodcutter or the horn of an old civil-service car." Giuseppe Ungaretti experienced the Gargano in the same years, visiting Monte Sant'Angelo: "Its houses, with their doors surmounted by balcony windows, look from this distance like a fret crowning the mountain."

Anna Maria Ortese was also captivated by the untamed and solitary beauty of the Gargano landscape but what most transpires of this land in her two reports written in 1951 is the contrast between enchanting places and the indigence of the local population, its isolation from the rest of the world, the poverty of the houses and the difficult lives of the women and children. "The Gargano – wrote Ortese – brought so many surprises in these two days that I still retain the image of an enchanted village. Here, the celestial beauty of things has isolated and lost people. At times, there seems to be nought but beatitude but then immediately afterwards you sense the presence of a dark despair."



Albeit even more remote and difficult to reach, the Tremiti Islands have also bewitched poets and writers. Ortese herself made them the setting of a travel story, published in *La lente oscura* (1991), and Riccardo Bacchelli was struck by the flocks of seagulls descending from cliff to sea, drawn by rubbish discarded into the waves: "Raucous birds swoop down bringing the joy of the loveliest carousels, skirmishes and flying patrols you might wish for." Lucio Dalla was, however, the most original bard of these islands, having spent long periods in his house in San Domino, overlooking Cala Matano. It is there that the unforgettable singer-songwriter from Bologna composed some of his greatest hits – *4 marzo 1943, La casa in riva al mare, Com'è profondo il mare* – narrating the extraordinarily beautiful sea, enchanting colours and the poetry of its small marine world and of a "a white house amid the blue".

A Peschici view;
above, Vieste, narrow and romantic alleys
near the Chianca Amara rock

INDEX OF PLACES

The page numbers in *italics* refer to the “Itineraries” section

A

Abbey of:

- San Leonardo di Siponto, 102
- San Pietro in Cuppis, 66
- Santa Maria di Pulsano, 77, 105
- Santissima Trinità, 57

Apricena, 20, 25, 108

B

Basilica of San Maria Maggiore
di Siponto, 103

Bays:

- Cala del Turco, 123
- Calenella, 122
- Manaccora, 47
- Mergoli or Zagare, 54, 125
- Pugnochiuso, 54, 124
- San Felice, 53, 123
- Sanguinara, 123

– Zagare, 54, 125

Beaches:

- Cala Lunga, 123
 - Colombi, 123
 - Foce Varano, 121
 - Fontana delle Rose, or Mattinatella, 125
 - Levante, 122
 - Manaccora, 122
 - Mattinatella, 125
 - Pizzomunno, 53, 123
 - Ponente, 122
 - Porto Greco, 123
 - Porto Piatto, 123
 - San Menaio, 122
 - Scialmarino, 47
 - Varano Island, 121
 - Vignanotica, 124
 - Zaiana, 122
- Borgo Celano, 83

C

Cagnano Varano, 61, 63, 108,
136

Cala Lunga, 47, 122

Calenella Plain, 45

Capraia (Tremiti), 97

Carpino, 64, 108, 136

Caves (see grotte)

Cento Pozzi sinkhole, 11

Civita (necropolis)

Church of:

- Crucifix of Varano, 40
 - Santa Maria di Merino, 50
 - Santa Maria di Monte Devio, 42
 - Santissima Annunziata, 40, 129
- Cretaccio (Tremiti), 96

E

Etruscan caves, 67

F

Ferrovie del Gargano

(Railway company), 61

Forest:

- Difesa, 81
- Ischitella and Carpino, 11, 66
- Marzini, 45
- Quarto, 11
- Spigno, 11
- Spinapulci, 11, 61
- Umbra, 11, 70

G

Gargano National Park, 16, 60

Grotte (caves):

- Craparezza, 50
- Grotta Calda, 124
- Grotta Campana Grande, 124
- Grotta dei Colombi, 123
- Grotta dei Due Occhi, 123
- Grotta dei Marmi, 123
- Grotta dei Pipistrelli, 124
- Grotta dei Pomodori, 123
- Grotta dell'Angelo, 20
- Grotta della Pergola, 124
- Grotta della Tavolozza, 123

- Grotta delle Colonne d'Ercole, 62
- Grotta delle Streghe, 62
- Grotta delle Viole, 96,
- Grotta dell'Occhio Magico
or Grotta Rossa, 124
- Grotta di Manaccora, 47
- Grotta di Montenero, 81
- Grotta di Tommasone, 20
- Grotta Paglicci, 20, 83
- Grotta Pian della Macina, 62
- Grotta Rossa, 124
- Grotta Sfondata, 123
- Grotta Smeraldo, 124
- Salata, 50
- St Michael, 63

H-I

Hermitage of:

- Pulsano, 77, 105
 - Stignano Valley, 82, 104
- Ischitella, 65, 130, 136
- Isola di Varano, 39

L

Lake:

- Lesina, 41

- Varano, 39, 129, 136
- Lido del Sole, 121

M

Manaccora, 47

Manacore del Gargano, 47

Masseria Palmieri, 41

Mattinata, 56, 109, 130

Merinum (ancient Roman town),
22, 50

Monastery of San Matteo,
83, 104

Mounts:

- Civita, 66
- Sacro, 57
- Saraceno, 57

N

Nature Reserves:

- Sfilzi, 70
 - Varano Island, 39, 121
- Necropolises:
- Mount Civita, 66
 - Mount Pucci, 46
 - Mount Saraceno, 21, 57
 - Santa Tecla, 54

O

Oasi Dune di Lesina, 41

P-Q

Peschici, 46, 117, 130, 136

Pianosa (Tremiti), 97

Pozzatina sinkhole, 9, 62

Pugnochiuso, 53

Punta di San Nicola, 47

Quarry at Pirro, 20

R

Rignano Garganico, 83, 108

Rodi Garganico, 43, 130, 138

S

Sanctuary church of:

– Madonna di Stignano, 81, 103

– San Michele arcangelo, 72, 105

San Domino (Tremiti), 92, 139

San Giovanni Rotondo, 77, 108, 130

San Marco in Lamis, 81, 108, 133

San Menaio, 45

San Nicandro Garganico, 61, 108, 130

San Nicola (Tremiti), 88, 131

Sfinalicchio Refuge, 20, 50

Sipontum, 22, 102

T

Testa del Gargano, 54

Towers:

– Aglio, 113

– Cala Lunga, 113

– Cala Rossa, 61, 112

– Campi, 113

– Fortore, 111

– Gattarella, 113

– Mileto, 42, 61, 112

– Monte Pucci, 45, 113

– Monte Saraceno, 115

– Preposti (San Menaio), 45, 113

– Preposti (Pergola Bay), 115

– Ponte, 113

– Porticello, 113

– Porto (Mattinata), 115

– Porto Greco, 113

– Portonuovo, 113

– Pugnochiuso, 115

– San Felice, 113

– Sanzone, 112

– Sfinale, 113

– Usmai, 113

– Varano Grande / Piccola, 112

Trabucco:

– Cala Lunga, 118

– Forcichella, 118

– Harbour (Vieste), 119

– La Chianca Island, 118

– Manaccora, 118

– Molinella, 118

– Monte Pucci, 46, 117

– Porticello, *or* Scialmarino, 118

– Punta La Testa, 54, 119

– Punta Lunga, 118

– Punta San Nicola, 47, 118

– Punta Usmai, 118

– San Francesco (Vieste), 52, 119

– San Lorenzo, 118

– San Nicola, 47, 118

– Scialmarino, 47, 118

– Tufara, 118

Tremiti, 17, 86, 126, 139

V

Valley of the Hermitages, 82, 105

Varano Plain, 108

Vico del Gargano, 23, 67, 130, 132, 133, 136

Vieste, 51, 118, 129, 135, 138

PICTURE CREDITS

The images are property of Franco Cautillo, except:

Ardito F: pp. 71 (above), 76; *Dreamstime*: pp. 24, 65 Milla74, p. 72 Valeria Cantone, p. 111 Janap, p. 121 Heinz Tschanz-Hofmann, p. 122 Roberto Zocchi; *GAL Gargano*: pp. 31, 32, 33; *Marka*: pp. 18-19 Adam Eastland, pp. 22, 26, 139 (above) Atlantide S.N.C, pp. 41, 91 (right), 93 (above and bottom), 97 (above) Danilo Donadoni, pp. 45, 124, 135 (above) Martin Moxter/ImageBROKER, pp. 57, 138 (bottom) marka/Scatagliini, pp. 60, 66, 80, 89 (above), 96, Giulio Andreini, pp. 84-85, 97 (bottom) Andrea Alborno, pp. 94, 95 (right) Maurilio Mazzola, p. 95 (above) Giovanni Guarino/ImageBROKER, pp. 25, 137 (left), 139 (bottom) CSP_milla74; p. 116 CSP_sgar80, pag. 137 (right) CSP_Maxcarphoto; *Shutterstock*: pp. 27 (right), 118 Mi.Ti, pp. 36-37 johnnymix, p. 52 Kite_rin, p. 70 joeborg, p. 79 Matteo Cozzi, pp. 81, 83 (above) cudak, p. 82 Mirek Hejniki, pp. 86, 90, 127, vaklav, pp. 89 (right), 93 (centre) maudanros, p. 112 Roberto Zilli, p. 136 GoneWithTheWind; *Sime*: pp. 90-91 Guido Cozzi, p. 123 Pietro Canali, p. 134 Massimo Borchì

The Touring Editore is happy to pay any royalties owed.

WEBSITES

www.galgargano.it

www.facebook.com/GalGargano

twitter.com/gargano_gal

www.youtube.com/channel/UC9Qzp1CxNK1YPSdgFURynpg