

# The Culture of Food in Puglia & Matera

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With Sophie Minchilli



Sophie Minchilli has been spending time in Puglia since she was born. Her father, Domenico, is from Puglia's capital, Bari, and his family home there has been her base to explore the entire region. She has since built a career there, sharing her passion for the region through social media, tours, and her book, *The Sweetness of Doing Nothing*.

Matera, in Basilicata, is one of Italy's most magical towns. Built amid ravines, the cave-filled Unesco World Heritage site is unique in the world. Join Sophie to spend two nights in a luxurious 5-star hotel as your base to discover this magical place.

During the 6-day tour, you'll explore all Sophie loves about this region, from a completely food-centric point of view. Your base for the first 4 days will be Bari, Puglia, before moving on to Matera, Basilicata for 2 nights.

During this week you'll visit some of her favorite places and meet friends — in small towns, through the countryside, and by the sea— tasting, drinking, eating, learning, and having fun. The days will be full of adventures, but don't worry, you'll have downtime as well to head off on your own to explore.

When: November 3-9, 2024

Where: Puglia and Basilicata, Italy

Nearest airport: Bari, Italy

# Sunday

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## Arrival & Introductions



### Arrival

We start the week in Puglia's capital: Bari. Our base here will be at the Grande Albergo delle Nazioni, situated on the Lungomare (seafront), and your post-modern decorated room overlooks the sea. You'll have a chance to settle in before meeting up later that evening.

In your room, you'll find a bottle of wine, water, and some snacks. You'll also have already received a copy of Sophie's book *The Sweetness of Doing Nothing*. During cocktails that evening Sophie will give you a branded canvas tote bag containing your schedule for the week and a personal guide to Bari with our favorite places to eat and shop to help you plan your free time.



### Drinks and dinner

We will meet for drinks to start our week on the hotel's rooftop terrace, which overlooks the Adriatic Sea. Sophie and Angelo, our licensed guide for the week, will be letting you know a bit about them, and what you'll be doing this week.

Then we head out to dinner, walking along the sea and into the ancient heart of Bari to one of our favorite fish restaurants. We'll kick off our week by sharing an array of small plates of antipasti, including vegetables, cheeses, and the seafood this town is famous for—dessert and after-dinner drinks to finish our first meal together.

# Monday

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## Bari



### Lungomare

Bari is Sophie's second home since Domenico (her father) was born and raised here. She will lead you on a stroll along the sea, pointing out buildings built by her great-grandfather, including the family home. We'll stop by the fish market and the old port, where our friend Giorgio will join us.

### Bari Vecchia

Giorgio will lead us into the winding alleys of the old part of town. Life in Bari Vecchia is lived on the street. Ground-level homes open directly onto small alleys, and you can peek in to see families gathered around their tables. Giorgio grew up here, and with him, we'll be able to enter into private courtyards and meet his friends. We'll also visit the women who make orecchiette, which they sell from little tables in the street.

We'll explore street food along the way, and lunch will be a moveable feast of freshly made focaccia, gelato, and coffee. In the afternoon you will have some free time to explore and shop on your own.

### Aperitivo

This evening we'll eat our way through the 'new' part of town, where many of the bars and restaurants are located. Our first stop will be at one of our favorite bars for an aperitivo, where we'll have a drink and some typical snacks.

### Dinner

We then continue our walk to one of Bari's newest restaurants made famous when Sophie visited with Stanley Tucci. Here, we'll have a demonstration of the famous *spaghetti all'assassina* before sitting down to dinner.

# Tuesday

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## Olive Oil, Cisternino, & Monopoli



### Olive Oil

Puglia is one of the largest producers of olive oil in Italy, and the history of oil production dates back thousands of years. Our first stop today will be a walk along one of the oldest roads in all of Italy: the Via Traiana. Our walk will take us amid some of the oldest olive trees in Italy (some as old as 2000 years), where Angelo puts this precious agricultural product into historical context. We will then visit a modern-day olive farm to learn how olive oil is extracted and have a formal olive oil tasting.

### Cisternino

After our olive oil tasting we hop back on the bus for the short drive to the village of Cisternino. We'll walk around the white-washed alleys while Angelo tells you about his hometown. Cisternino is home to a traditional type of restaurant called

*fornello*. These are small butcher shops where you pick out your meat to be cooked in traditional wood-burning grills. After a hearty lunch of specialties from the area, we'll stop by Angelo's family's bar for a quick coffee where locals go.

### Monopoli

On our way back to Bari, we will visit the charming seaside town of Monopoli. The oldest part of town is still surrounded by ancient walls that run right into the sea. We'll visit the main square where retired fishermen gather, as well as the port, where small boats come in every evening with the catch of the day. It is one of the most beautiful fortified ports in Puglia and is still active and a part of daily life.

### Dinner

On your own tonight. Sophie is happy to give you advice and make reservations.

# Wednesday

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## Valle d'Itria



### Locorotondo

Today we will continue our exploration of the small villages of central Puglia. Our first stop is Locorotondo. This whitewashed village stands atop a hill and has amazing views out over the Itrian valley below. It is often referred to as Puglia's prettiest town and is part of the association of 'I Borghi Più Belli d'Italia.' We'll wander the pristine streets and learn about the history of this fairytale-like town. With no major monuments but beauty at every corner, the town epitomizes the ideal of *dolce far niente*.

### Cheese and lunch

Puglia is known for its fresh cheeses like mozzarella, burrata, and ricotta. Much of it is produced on very small-scale, family-run farms. We will spend the late morning with a family who has been producing cheese for generations.

After a tour and demonstration, we will have a delicious lunch in their private home.

### Alberobello

If you've only seen one photograph of Puglia, chances are it's one of Alberobello. This fantastical little village is made up of structures that are called Trulli. These round, cone-topped stone buildings date back centuries, and their origins remain a mystery. Angelo will explain how these structures came to be as we wander around this Unesco-protected town, popping in and out of Trulli.

### Dinner

On your own tonight. Let us know if you need help deciding what to do.

# Thursday

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## Altamura



After breakfast, we will be packing our bags to change hotels. But before we get to our new destination, we have quite a full day.

### **Bread**

Altamura is located between Bari and Matera and is home to one of the most respected and ancient bread-making traditions in Italy. Pane di Altamura, famous all over Italy, is made from hard durum wheat and still baked in wood-burning ovens. We will be visiting one of these living cultural monuments, seeing how it is made, and having a tasting of the freshly baked bread and focaccia.

### **Cheese**

We then head down the street to visit Sophie's dear friend Vito at his family's business. Vito and his family are considered to be one of the best cheese makers in Puglia.

While they make traditional cheeses like mozzarella, burrata, and scamorza, they also have created award-winning newer cheeses like their blue cheese topped with wild berries, which chefs from all over Italy feature in their restaurants.

We will not only have a cheese-making demonstration but, of course, will get a chance to taste these wonderfully unique cheeses.

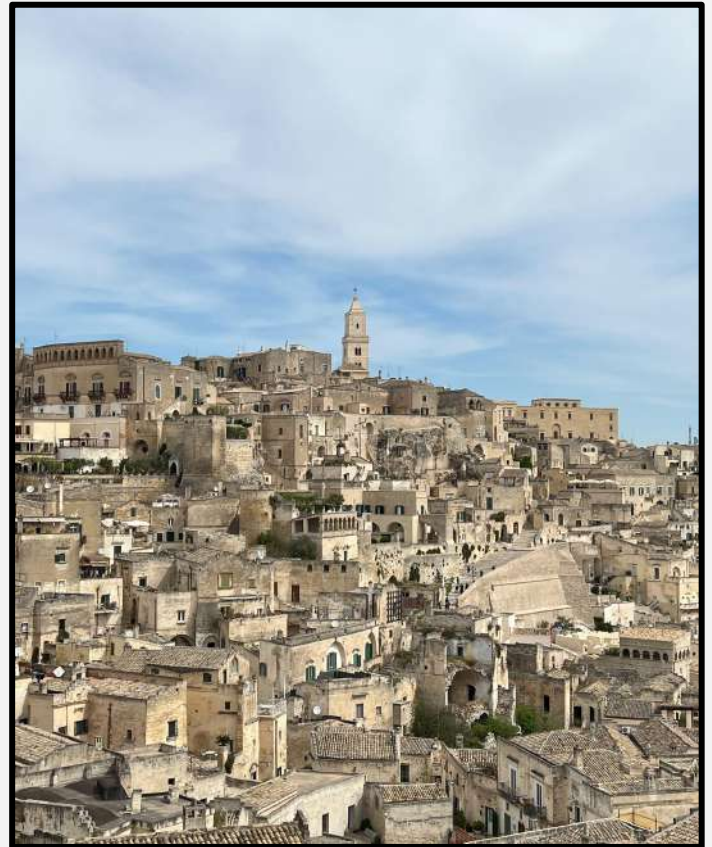
### **Pastries**

We will then walk into the historic center of town, passing by the impressive 13th-century cathedral, heading towards a bakery located next to the monastery of Santa Chiara, where the bakers still use the ancient recipes handed down from the nuns. We'll try a special cream-filled pastry - *Tette delle Monache* (Nun's Breast!) and a coffee before heading to Matera.

# Thursday

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## Arrival in Matera



### Arrival in Matera

We arrive at our home for the next two nights, Sextantio, in the ancient heart of Matera. The village of Matera, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is completely unique. Located amid the ravines of the wild corner of Basilicata, the town is made up of hundreds of caves that have been transformed into dwellings. We will each be staying in our own ‘cave’, which make up the hotel, facing the spectacular Murgia Park with its rock-hewn churches.

While we may be living in ‘caves,’ they have each been restored into luxurious retreats, retaining the original plan and materials while incorporating minimalist design elements. The resulting atmosphere is evocative and steeped in ancient history. It is one of our favorite hotels in all of Italy.

### Dinner

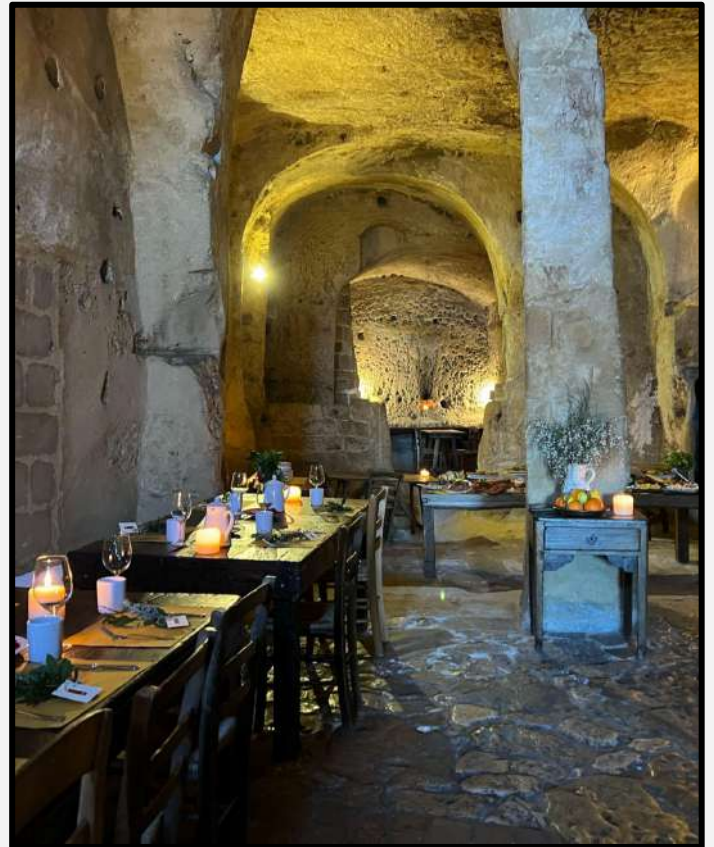
After settling into your rooms, you’ll have some time to rest. In the early evening, we will meet to walk through the winding white streets of this ancient town for dinner at one of our favorite trattorias, tasting our way through some of the specialties of Basilicata.

After our dinner we will walk through the empty streets of Matera, when it is its most magical, making our way back to our home for the next two nights.

# Friday

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## Matera & Farewell Dinner



### Breakfast

Breakfast at Sextantio is served in the 13th-century ex-cave-church. Beneath the vaulted arches, wooden tables are set upon the ancient flagstones. Cakes, pastries, bread and cookies, marmalades, fruits, cheeses, and salami come from a nearby farm and other trusted artisans in the surrounding countryside of Basilicata. And, of course, the signature bread that is made in the ancient ovens of Matera. Enjoy a big breakfast since you will be on your own for lunch.

### Morning

We will spend the entire morning exploring Matera. Angelo will lead us on a tour of this mysterious town. You will probably recognize some of the views. Since it hasn't changed in thousands of years, it's often used to film historical movies (most famously *The Passion of the Christ*).

We will explore the town, visiting the main monuments and a few caves that have been transformed into hotels or homes.

### Lunch

Since we will be having a big dinner this evening, you are free for lunch. The town is full of casual places to eat, and we will share a list of our favorites.

### Afternoon

You are free to explore Matera on your own this afternoon. If you are interested in a massage in your room, that can be arranged.

### Dinner

We will meet up for our final dinner at the hotel. We have the entire candle-lit cave to ourselves, where we will enjoy a special farewell feast.



# Saturday

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## Departure



## Check-out

Our tour is officially over, and after one last breakfast, you will be checking out of the hotel. Let us know if you need help arranging a transfer to the airport or train station in Bari (about an hour away).

# About This Tour

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## Important information: please read



### The Culture of Food

All of our tours are about exploring places through the culture of food. This means that almost all of our activities are food related. You can expect big meals and often snacks in between. If you do not have a big appetite, have food intolerances, are squeamish, or are a picky eater, this is not the tour for you.

### Food Intolerances

Since we are in southern Italy, the cuisine is focused on the Mediterranean Diet, so there will be plenty of vegetables. That said, many of our group meals revolve around local food traditions and may include fish or meat and almost always cheese. If you are vegetarian or gluten intolerant, you will not go hungry, but you will also not be experiencing the full range of the food culture we will be exploring.

### Activity Level

Each day, we will be exploring a new town or village. Our days are often long and will involve walking up to an hour or more. While the level is never overly strenuous, you must be able to keep up with the rest of the group. PLEASE NOTE: The hotel in Matera involves steps and walking to get there. If you have mobility issues, including problems with uneven ground, stairs, hills, etc., then this tour might not be for you.

### Travel Companions

If you are thinking about bringing along a traveling companion (friend, spouse, relative, partner), please make sure they are aware of the types of things we will be doing. If they are not interested in food, visiting farms, eating in rustic settings, etc., they won't enjoy this tour.

# Details

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## Dates & Fee



### Dates:

November 3-9, 2024

### Price:

€6900 per person (double occupancy)

€7800 per person (single occupancy)

Since our tours are based on small family-run businesses, we reserve the right to vary the specifics of the itinerary. We may switch days, add/change activities, or substitute locations. We send out an updated itinerary within 30 days prior to the start date.

Each tour is limited to 12 participants

### The fee includes:

- 4 nights at Grande Albergo delle Nazioni
- 2 nights at Sextantio Matera
- Buffet breakfast in hotel
- All of the meals, activities and transportation outlined above
- A copy of Sophie's book *The Sweetness of Doing Nothing*

### Not included:

- Transportation to and from Italy
- Transportation to and from hotel

For more information and to book this tour please email [minchillitours@gmail.com](mailto:minchillitours@gmail.com)

# About Us

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## Your guides for the week

### Sophie Minchilli

Sophie, daughter of [Elizabeth](#), admits that her life revolves around food. She graduated from the London College of Communication, writing a dissertation on food in Italian cinema. Her first book, [The Sweetness of Doing Nothing: Living Life the Italian Way with Dolce Far Niente](#), was published by Harper Collins UK in 2021. Sophie lives in Rome and works with Elizabeth, organizing tours in her favorite city in the world, as well as [her own private tour company](#).

You can see Sophie on the Puglia episode of season 2 of “[Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy](#)” which is available on [CNNgo](#) and [Discovery+](#).

### Angelo Calianno

Angelo is a freelance journalist, photographer, and the best (in our opinion) historical and cultural guide in Puglia. He is from the small town of Cisternino and shares his passion for his home with guests through his work as a professional tour guide. While we love hearing about the histories of the towns we visit, we also love it when he shares stories of growing up in Puglia: making pasta with his grandmother, his grandfather taking care of the Trullo where they live, and running around the countryside of Cisternino.

When not exploring Puglia, Angelo travels the world, documenting his work through words and photography.