

Southern Italy

In late June/early July, sandwiched between an alumni reunion in Malta and a wedding in Gaeta, Italy, I found myself in the oh-so-difficult position of having 10 days or so to kill in Italy.

I decided a road trip through the south of Italy was in order. Aside from Sicily, I'd never been south of the Amalfi Coast and I was eager to explore the southern provinces: Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria. After a wedding in Gaeta (between Rome and Sicily), I spent two nights on the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples, and then the last night in Naples.

A quick aside—this was my second trip to Malta and while it's still not high on my list of places to visit, I did love our hotel:

The Phoenicia - Malta

The Mall
FRN 1478 Floriana
+356 (0)212 25241
info@phoeniciamalta.com
Hotel: €270/2 people (breakfast included)

It's newly renovated, just by the entrance to the walled city of Valetta, has a wonderful restaurant and terrace, friendly staff and beautiful grounds with a lovely infinity pool. The hotel was definitely the highlight of Malta for most of us.

As for the Italy itinerary below, I don't think there is much I would change were I to do it over again. In fact, I'd happily do the same trip over again any time! The first few days were a bit rushed—a couple nights in each place would have been nice—but then is much less driving once you reach Puglia. As usual, I was a tourist by day and working most late afternoons/evenings from the hotel, so if you were 100% on vacation, it also would give you more down time.

Just a few suggestions for alternatives: If you have not already been to the Amalfi coast though, I'd probably spend the five Gaeta and Ischia nights below based in Positano. You could also easily tweak this itinerary to fly round trip in and out of Naples or Rome. And definitely don't miss a visit to Rome if you haven't been. One last idea—the Aeolian islands (accessible by ferry from Naples or from Palermo) are well worth a detour if you have the extra time.


Food-wise: we ate at so many wonderful restaurants and really no bad restaurants. I have only mentioned my absolute favorites below.


A final note—the prices below (single v. double occupancy) may be a bit inconsistent only because I traveled with friends at the start and the end of the trip, but traveled alone for five days in the middle.

My photos here are posted on [my Smugmug site](#).

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Notes/Comments
Monday, June 19th	Fly Malta to Rome Fiumicino Drive Fiumicino to Pescosansonesco (2h25)	<i>Flight:</i> To Rome (Fiumicino) T2 - FR7592 Ryan Air <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0;"> Depart: Malta (MLA) Date: Mon, 19 Jun 17 Time: 08:50 Arrival Rome (Fiumicino) T2 (FCO) Date: Mon, 19 Jun 17 Time: 10:25 </div> <i>Car (June 19 10h45 - July 1 10h45):</i> Europcar <i>Hotel:</i> Tenuta Testarossa  Contrada Peschiera 69, 65020 Pescosansonesco, Italy (Phone: +393929475461) (Check-in after 2pm, breakfast included)	<i>Flight:</i> \$35.82 <i>Car:</i> €318.28 <i>Hotel:</i> €108 (for 2 people)	Tenuta Tetarossa is a beautiful property near the Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga. We unfortunately didn't have time to explore too much of the surrounding area, but just staying put by the pool and dining on the premises was a treat.

Tuesday, June 20th	Drive to Vieste (3h)	<p>Relais La Pretura  Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 2, 71019 Vieste, Italy (Phone: +393388115243) Check-in after 14h30</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €79 for 2 people (no breakfast, €8 for parking)</p>	<p>Vieste is a beautiful whitewashed city and well worth exploring. Our hotel was wonderful, very friendly, and although there was no pool, the roof deck was great for sunbathing.</p>
Wednesday, June 21st - Thursday, June 22, 2017	Drive to Locorotondo (~3h00)	<p><i>Hotel:</i> Leonardo Trulli Resort  S.C. 54 C.Da Semeraro 107, 70010 Locorotondo, Italy (Phone: +393331623529) Breakfast included, free parking check-in after 15h</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €200 per night (1 or 2 people—same price)</p>	<p>We drove the coastal route south of Vieste through Gargano National Park. We had lunch in Andria (the home of burrata!) before arriving in Locorotondo.</p> <p>To see/do in Puglia: Alberobello, Gallipoli, Lecce (reserve lunch: http://www.lezie.it/), Locorotondo, Ostuni, Otranto, Valle d'Itria http://www.charmingpuglia.com/en/top-10-places-in-puglia https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2012/aug/13/readers-tips-best-of-puglia http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destination/europe/italy/puglia/articles/36-hours-in-puglia/</p> <p>Our hotel had its own trulli (the famous round huts of the region) and a beautiful pool. The hotel serves dinner on site—a bit pricey, but one of the best dinner of our trip. The second night we had dinner in the center of Locorotondo, also a bit pricey but excellent: http://www.binaristorante.it/. We visited Alberobello during the day on Thursday, along with a few smaller towns in the Valle d'Itria.</p>
Friday, June 23, 2017 - Saturday, June 24th	Drive to Minervino di Lecce (1h40)	<p><i>Hotel:</i> Palazzo Siena - Home & More  Piazza del Popolo 10 (Specchia Gallone), 73027 Minervino di Lecce, Italy (Phone: +39 3284873275) Breakfast included, free parking, arrive at 16h or call ahead</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €258.96/2 nights</p>	<p>En route to Minervino di Lecce, we visited Ostuni, Lecce and Otranto. Minervino itself doesn't offer much, but it's well worth staying there for the lovely Palazzo Siena. The building, the grounds and the pool were amazing, and the owners will prepare a homemade dinner for you with a bit of notice. The second evening, I was on my own and the owners' daughter was visiting, but they invited me to join their family dinner! I'd go back just to stay at Palazzo Siena again. I did visit Gallipoli on Saturday morning, which was probably my favorite town in the heel of Italy.</p>
Sunday, June 25th - Monday, June 26th	Drive to Matera (2h30)	<p><i>Hotel:</i> Giardini di Pietra http://www.giardinidipietra.com/  Via Gradoni Duomo, 16, 75100 Matera, Italy (Phone: +390835332090) Breakfast included</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €303.80/2 nights</p>	<p><i>Parking:</i> Parking area in Piazza del Mulino (at the intersection between via Lucana and via Cappelluti number 1. €12,00 per day (0,50 euro per hour).</p> <p>Matera is a town that doesn't seem real. It's where they filmed Mel Gibson's <i>Passion of the Christ</i>, because it looks like what you'd imagine a city in Biblical times to look like. You can't park anywhere in the old city, but you don't need the car. Just walk and explore! Giardini di Pietra is an exceptional hotel. I missed not having a pool but I'm not sure any hotels in the old city would have had a pool. It was extremely hot but I tended to walk around in the morning and late afternoon, staying in the cool room around mid-day.</p>

<p>Tuesday, June 27th</p>	<p>Drive to Maratea (2h45)</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> ReginElena B&B  VIA A. MANDARINI 28, 85046 Maratea, Italy (Phone: +393421438981) Check-in 3pm, breakfast included</p> <p>While the B&B was lovely and certainly budget-friendly, if you stay here be sure to request a room that is NOT on the street. Between traffic and church bells ringing every 15 minutes all night long, I did not get one wink of sleep!</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €60 (free parking at hotel)</p>	<p>On the way out of town, I stopped by the Belvedere di Murgia Timone, a great panoramic viewpoint looking back at Matera.</p> <p>http://www.italia.it/en/travel-ideas/nature-and-wildlife/basilicata-and-pollino-national-park.html http://www.italyheaven.co.uk/basilicata/pollino.html</p> <p>I took a bit of a detour en route to Maratea, stopping in Pollino National Park, at the mountainous towns of Viggianello and Rotonda. I had hoped to get some real hiking in, but between lack of time and the mid-day heat, I ended up just walking around the town and having a wonderful lunch at Da Peppe in Rotonda. The owners mentioned to me that they run a B&B as well and I said I'd be back another time to stay overnight and do more hiking. https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g1535857-d1593251-Reviews-Da_Peppe_RISTORANTE-Rotonda_Province_of_Potenza_Basilicata.html</p> <p>Maratea is a beautiful town in a wonderful setting on the cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean. In the evenings, they close off the main streets of the center to traffic and it becomes a lively pedestrian area. I spent a good bit of time exploring the town.</p>
<p>Wednesday, June 28th – Friday, June 30th</p>	<p>Drive to Gaeta (3h30)</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> Grand Hotel Le Rocce Via Flacca Km 23.300 04024 Gaeta (LT) Tel: 0771 740985 - Fax: 0771 741633 Email: reservation@lerocce.com</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €570 for 3 nights/2 people (breakfast included; free parking)</p>	<p>I visited Gaeta for a wedding and spent a good bit of time on the lovely grounds of Hotel Le Rocce. They also have a couple of restaurants. The old town of Gaeta is lovely though and worth a visit as well.</p> <p>Friday morning, we decided to walk off some of the eating and did a wonderful 2-hour or so hike starting about a 30 minutes' drive from Gaeta and up to and a bit beyond the Eremo di San Michele Arcangelo, a church built into the cliffs: http://www.cailaziolh.it/sentiero-lh14-monte-redentore/</p>

Saturday, July 1st – Sunday July 2nd	Drive to Naples Airport (1h30), drop car at Naples airport (10h45), ferry to Ischia	<p><i>Ferry:</i> Pick-up at Naples Airport Rental Car Offices 11h (Ischia Review transfer details: http://www.ischiareview.com/return-transfer-from-naples-to-ischia-payment.html)</p> <p><i>Hotel:</i> Grand Hotel Il Moresco  Via Emanuele Gianturco 16, Ischia Porto, 80077 Ischia, Italy (Phone: +39081981355) Breakfast included</p> <p>The hotel was definitely a treat, with its heated grotto pool, and we loved the dinner we had at the hotel the last evening as well.</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €550.80 for 2 nights/2 people</p> <p><i>Round-trip Naples-Ischia transfer (hydrofoil out, ferry return):</i> €215 for 2 people (paid)</p>	<p>http://www.ischiareview.com/ Ischia Review contacts: Dion Protani (0039) 328 938 9080 Carolina Cuervo (0039) 328 185 7877</p> <p>We returned the rental car in Naples and organized the Ischia leg of the trip through Ischia Review. The transfers were a bit pricey, compared to what you could do on your own, but it was worthwhile as we had limited time. Dion of Ischia Review is extremely helpful and goes out of his way to give personalized recommendations. I would definitely enlist his help in the future! We did a wonderful hike on his recommendation: https://www.ischiareview.com/schiappon-e-to-campagnano-via-la-scarrupata.html</p> <p>Aside from the hike, visiting Ischia Castle was probably the highlight of our Ischia visit.</p>
Monday, July 3rd	Ferry back to Naples	<p><i>Pick-up at hotel for ferry:</i> 14h30 for 15h20 ferry</p> <p><i>Hotel:</i> Palazzo Alabardieri  Via Alabardieri 38, Chiaia, 80121 Naples, Italy (Phone: +39081415278) Breakfast included</p>	<p><i>Hotel:</i> €133.50/2 people</p>	<p>We had not planned to spend a lot of time in Naples but ended up taking an earlier ferry back to the city to have the whole afternoon to explore. We loved Underground Naples—visiting the ancient Roman ruins under the current day Naples—and just exploring the busy streets of the old city. Our hotel was great and in a calmer part of the city (but in walking distance to everything). The highlight of the evening was walking along the Via Partenope promenade, blocked to traffic in the evenings. We had Neopolitan pizza at the nearby Mattozzi Restaurant & Pizzeria. It did not disappoint.</p>
Tuesday, July 4th	Fly Naples to JFK	<p><i>Flight:</i> Meridiana Flight #IG3940 (12h50 – 17h00)</p>	<p><i>Flight:</i> €317.07</p>	<p>Direct flight! No complaints.</p>