MATERA

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WHAT TO SEE

Matera is the third oldest city in the world, after Aleppo and Jericho: for 10,000 consecutive years, the men who live this land have crossed the history of humanity. Testimonies of the presence of man since the late Paleolithic are collected in the National Archaeological Museum Domenico Ridola (Via Ridola) and in some archaeological sites located in the Murgia and Timmari area.

In 1993 the Sassi became an Unesco World Heritage Site, thanks also to the recognition of this chaotic urban system as an ingenious machine dedicated to the preservation of water. In a somewhat arid, source-free territory (the Sassi rises on a hard calcarenite block), human genius has captured and preserved rainwater with a collection and storage system in huge tanks stored in the heart hidden of the Sassi. One of these has been recovered and can be visited: the Palombaro Lungo, which is accessed by the central Piazza Vittorio Veneto, offers an evocative and singular atmosphere that makes the idea of how much work, ingenuity, and abilities needed to make it possible the adaptation of man to natural conditions.
It is precisely the concept of "resilience", that is the ability to adapt himself to the difficulties and changes, that has allowed to Matera to win the title of European Capital of Culture 2019. A prestigious and important appointment for the small center of Lucania region. A quick flash of how Matera's citizen lived over the centuries, it is possible to catch it by visiting a Casa Grotta in the Sassi, recovered and equipped with original instruments and furnishings dating back to the period prior to the displacement.

In fact in 1948 Palmiro Togliatti (Secretary of the Italian Communist Party) visited Matera, denouncing the miserable living conditions of the farmers of Matera, and declaring the Sassi "national shame". The Govern (De Gasperi law) therefore decreed the emptying and expropriation of the ancient quarters and attributing to families new houses built in urban agglomerations in the surrounding countryside; this new apartments were built with an appreciable architectural criterion, also under the guidance of Adriano Olivetti, president of the National Institute of Urbanism.

In truth, the difficult living conditions of the Lucanian people, deaf to the influences of time and history, were denounced by the writer and painter Carlo Levi in the book "Christ stopped at Eboli", telling the story of his confinement in the province of Matera (Aliano and Grassano) suffered during the Fascist period, which revived the debate on the South Italy problems. The opera of the painter Carlo Levi may be seen visiting a beautiful collection in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Medievale di Palazzo Lanfranchi, which also includes a rich collection of paintings of the sixteenth century and works of art from rock churches. In addition to the book, Carlo Levi has also handed over to the memory of this city a visual work, the large panel "Lucania 1961", from which he narrates from his perspective the life of the people who had hosted him during the confinement with a key reading marked by a thread of severity and resignation, which luckily in the years to come Matera will have the strength to leave behind.

The phase of "national shame" is in fact only a parenthesis of the millennial history of the Sassi of Matera, whose system is also based on the monastic settlements that here excavated magnificent
churches in the rock, some recovered and visitable, such as the **Convicinio di Sant'Antonio**, or the magnificent **Cripta del Peccato Originale**, called the "Sistine Chapel of Rock Churches" and rises near the San Giuliano Dam, just few minutes outside the city.

In addition to rock Churches, the city offers a varied set of more modern churches, witnessing a profound and ancient spirituality that permeates these places (filmed by many religious themes filmed in the city, from the Gospel According to Matthew of Pier Paolo Pasolini, to the recent The Passion by Mel Gibson), among which we note the severe **Chiesa del Purgatorio** (Via Ridola) and the singular **Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista** (via San Biagio), which certainly deserve a visit. We also mention the **Convento di Sant'Agostino** in the Sasso Barisano, for its ancient rocks crypt on which it stands, and for the beautiful view of the promontory of Gravina and the Sasso Barisano, loved by many tourists and photographers.

On the other hand, the Cathedral stands on the promontory that divides the Sasso Barisano (looking eastwards, towards Bari) by the Sasso Caveoso (overlooking the south, towards Montescaglioso, the ancient Mons Caveousus); from its square you can enjoy a good deal on the Barisano, and go for one of the many beautiful accesses and stunning stairs that descend into the Sassi.
WHAT TO EAT

The food of Matera is made up of simple flavors of earth and peasants.

Sausages, Cheese and Dairy Products, Bread, Vegetables: with these simple ingredients you can create amazing dishes that you can still taste today in all their authenticity.

In addition to dining in one of the many restaurants in the city, it is possible to buy directly from markets, bakeries, caseifici, the typical products of our land, to bring home and enjoy them directly. These are our favorite places.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

It is possible to buy fruits and vegetables, but also meat and fish, in the central and ancient market of via Ascanio Persio, near Piazza Vittorio Veneto. Or from "Fior di Frutta" by E. Fantasia, in via Lucana 230 (right in front of Supermarket Supermarket, see below).

SALUMI, CONSERVE, SORRY CHEESE

For the purchase of typical products we recommend to visit the Latteria Rizzi (via Duni, 2), where you may also be served at the table, or Superemme Supermarket (Via Ridola 77) where you can buy wines, cold meats, cheeses and fresh bread.
BAGS AND BREAD BREAD

There are plenty of bakeries in town. Each one has its own "taste" of the product... In one of them, you can buy the typical bread of Matera. Matera's bread was born in the Sassi: mothers used to prepare it weekly in 5 kilos form and cooking it in the common ovens, labeled with their own specific stamp to recognize his own piece (the stamps of wood are now a typical object that tourists can buy as souvenir, also personalized with your initials!). Bakeries also offer an infinite range of focacce (with sauce, fresh tomatoes, potatoes, courgettes ...) and all kinds of preparations: mattonelle (pasta tin baking tin with cheese and cooked ham), panzerotti, sandwiches, sweet and savory biscuits.

Our favorite shops are Panificio Perrone di Agna (Via Farina), Panificio Martino (via Cappuccini, 24), which also offers the possibility to buy soft drinks and fresh produce, Panificio De Palo in Piazza degli Olmi (near via Dante), with tables and chairs also in the open, where you can also enjoy pizzas, pucce, sandwiches. Also worth mentioning is the Panificio Pane e Pace, in Via Cenerie 49 (opposite the Caseificio Lucano, see below).

A real city institution is instead the focaccia of Paoluccio, liked by workers and students, in the homonymous small bakery in via del Corso. If you find yourself passing by with a little hunger, a bite to this masterpiece is a must, and if you are lucky enough to taste it hot, life will smile! :-)

FRESH CHEESE

The tradition of fresh cheese resists the threat of large distribution and industry. There are still a number of cheese factories in which you could buy mozzarella, ricotta, burrate, scamorze, pecorini, and the many fresh daily products. Our favorites are the Caseificio del Pino (Via cappelluti 66/70, near the large round), Caseificio Lucano (Via Cererie, 26), and the central Caseificio Maggiore (Piazza Vittorio Veneto, corner with via delle Beccherie).
WHERE TO EAT

The enogastronomic offer is maternal and wide and of good standard everywhere, often a reason to visit beyond the historical and artistic beauties of the place.

All restaurants are generally oh good level, but we still provide this little guide written according to our taste, for a first orientation regarding the city's supply, grossly divided for spending bands. We would love to write it together, if you have visited one of these places or want to report others, please contact us.

We recommend booking with a certain advance in high season.

STREET FOOD

Materan people never run, but street food has always been the consumer favourite food. Bakeries and bars often offer tables and chairs to consume the purchased food. If you are hungry, or if you want to have lunch or dine without spending a lot, we recommend buying a good hot focaccia in one of the bakeries in Matera (always ask for a hot piece!). Alternatively you can eat a panzerotto, the best of which is certainly produced by Bar Sottozero, a true town institution for stuffed fried pasta. You can eat the best “puccia” (a sort of sandwich made with pasta of pizza and stuffed with local products) of the city to Quattro Quarti (via Ascanio Persio, 25). There are also a number of pizzerias that offer cutting pizza: we recommend those a little further away from the center: the pizzeria "Altra Pizza" (via Pentasuglia, 39) near the Villa Comunale, for example. If it is time for a good ice cream, the best are the ice cream "I vizi degli Angeli" (via Ridola, 36) known for its elaborate and imaginative flavors, and the most traditional "L'orchidea" ice-cream shop in via Roma.

In all of these cases a good supper (or lunch replacement) will cost you no more than 4-5 euros per person, including drink.

PIZZA

If the cut pizza is a too frugal meal and instead want to have a pizza at the table, you will find a lot of pizzerias in Matera. Generally the pizza is thin and crunchy. Some of the restaurants listed below also serve pizza (La Talpa, Stone, La Pignata, Paolangelo). To these we add the Pizzeria il Moro (vico IV Cappelluti, 2), a historic restaurant of Matera, now exclusively pizzeria, with fresh and large external dehors and, just outside the city, in the La Martella district - builded during the Sassi depopulation in the 50s and 60s - the Poeta Contadino (Piazza della Concordia, Ecopolis Village). If you prefer the neapolitan pizza, this place is yours: Oi Mari (Via Fiorentini, 66), in the heart of the Sassi.
You will spend from 10 to 15 euros per head.

TOURISTIC RESTAURANTS AND TAVERNS

Good value-for-money restaurants are: **Genuino Cucina e Bottega** (Via Lucana, 254) and the nearby **Trattoria Paolangelo** (Via Duni, 14) and **Trattoria La Pignata** (via Duni, 16/20), all three near the Palazzo Lanfranchi Museum.

The bill will be about 15-20 euros per head.

QUALITY RESTAURANTS

Some quality restaurants are in the Sassi. We recommend the **Trattoria del Caveoso** (via B. Buozzi, 21), the **Ristorante 900** (via S. Stefano 21) at the entrance of Sasso Barisano, the **Ristorante le Botteghe** (Piazzetta San Pietro Barisano, 22), which specializes in grilled meats, **La Talpa** (via Fiorentini, 167) with its pleasing external court.

The spending will be around 20-30 euros per head.
RESTORATION OF EXCELLENCE

For a special and unforgettable evening, we recommend the **Abbondanza Lucana** (Via Buozzi, 11) at the entrance of the Sasso Caveoso, **Osteria Pico** (Via Fiorentini, 42) in the Sasso Barisano, **Ristorante Le Fornaci** (Piazza Firrao, 7) near the municipal villa, if you prefer eat good fish. In these cases the account is a bit higher than the average, but the quality of the preparations, the refinement of the raw materials and the service justify the price. Often the owners of these premises are invited to show their recipes in well-known Italian television program.

![image](image.png)

Consider spending over € 30 per head.
NEARBY MATERA

A few kilometers from Matera, within an hour or maximum one and a half hours of driving, you can encounter different and important points of interest, which can be visited during the day. Programing a medium-long holiday that has the epicenter of the city of the Sassi, will allow you to experience a satisfying and fulfilling experience, visiting many of the most beautiful resorts of Basilicata and nearby Apulia. These are some of our suggestions.

Montescaglioso (19 Km, 15 minutes): Montescaglioso is a small village not far from Matera, which preserves one of lucanian artistic masterpieces: San Michele Arcangelo Abbey, founded by the Benedictines in the XI century. It is also worth mentioning the eighteenth-century Mother Church, which with its bell tower of 45 meters dominates the inhabited center. It contains 4 works by Mattia Preti. Montescaglioso divides Matera with the Park of Murgia with numerous rock churches, which can be visited by simple paths.
Altamura (20 Km, 20 minutes): a medieval village with a renowned cathedral, it has its reputation for its famous bread similar to Matera bread (but less good, say here in Matera!). The Cava Pontreilli keeps thousands of dinosaur tracks dating back over 70 million years ago (hope will open early).

Miglionico (20 Km, 30 minutes): in this small town in the hill oh Matera was written a famous chapter in medieval Italy history. Its castle is in fact nicknamed "Malconsiglio Castle" and it was the scenario of the "Conspiracy of Barons" (celebrated in August each year with a spectacular historical show) in 1485 by southern feudalists against the Crown ...

Costa Jonica, from Metaponto to Policoro (40/50 Km, 40/50 minutes). Besides the wide golden beaches, a favorite destination for summer vacationers, the Ionic coast also offers interesting testimonies of the glorious Greek past. The colonies of Magna Grecia (Metapontum, Siris, Erakleia) were flourishing and lush. In Metaponto dead the great mathematician Pythagoras. Witnesses of that season are excavations archaeologists, museums, and the majestic Palatine Tables, rest of the greek temple of Metaponto.
**Irsina** (45 Km, 45 minutes): religious and cultural center in medieval times, has recently climbed to the forefront of the chronicle for the discovery of a wooden work attributed to Andrea Mantegna, to date the only sculpture that came to us of Padua's genius, one of the fathers of the Italian Renaissance. Also enjoy the view of the beautiful countryside surrounding, with sweet and combed hills that change color every season depending on the current agricultural phase. It is one of the favourite towns for foreign people that decide to transfer their residence in South Italy...

![Irsina Picture](image1.jpg)

**Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa** (80km, 50 minutes): both in the list of the most beautiful villages in Italy, share the spectacular and romantic panorama of the Lucanian Dolomites, now famous in many photos and postcards. Those who love the thrill can experience the adrenaline of the *Volo dell'Angelo*: one and a half Km free-of-flight suspended from a steel cable stretched between the two countries, reaching peak speeds of 120 km / h.

![Castelmezzano and Pietrapertosa Picture](image2.jpg)

**Craco** (56 Km, an hour): The old town is a ghost town of medieval origin, abandoned in 1963 for the frantic phenomena that were affecting it. His scenic beauty inspired writers, poets and film directors, (King David, La Lupa, The Passion).

![Craco Picture](image3.jpg)
Tursi (70 km, one hour): rises among the slopes of sandstone hills between the rivers Agri and Sinni, about twenty kilometers from the Ionian coast. The village is dominated by the Rabatana, founded by the Saracens before the year 1000, a tangle of cobblestones, tunnels, boulders, alleyways and winding stairs that lead to deep precipices dotted with caves dug into clay. It was sung by poet Albino Pierro, multiple times nominee for the Literature Nobel.

Aliano (90 km, one hour and 10 minutes) has its reputation for having been chosen as the town of the confinement of Carlo Levi, who resided here three in 1935 and 1936. The stay was so impressive in his life that some a year later he wrote the book "Christ stopped at Eboli", causing scandal for the revelation of the terrible living conditions of the Lucanian, so far from well-being and progress. To the writer and painter Levi is dedicated a beautiful literary park, and it is possible to visit the symbolic places of his adventure on this land.

Venosa (94 Km, one hour and 15 minutes): inserted in the list of the most beautiful villages in Italy, Venosa was the homeland of the great Latin poet Orazio Flacco born here in 65 AD. It preserves numerous archaeological testimonies of its glorious past, such as the Casa di Orazio, the tomb of the Roman consul Marcello, the castle of Pirro del Balzo, the complex of the Holy Trinity, the so-called “unfinished”
Melfi (120 Km, an hour and 20 minutes): an important center of the Norman age, preserves one of the most majestic castles of Frederick II overlooking the beautiful medieval village. The Santa Margherita crypt is one of the jewels of rock art, with the famous fresco depicting Frederick II in hawk dresses.

Castellana Grotte (65 Km, an hour and 20 minutes): a visit to the extraordinary heritage of stalactites and stalagmites of this world-famous site is an unmissable emotion.

Alberobello (70 Km, an hour and half): Unesco site since 1996, the picturesque town of trulli, celebrated in billions of photos, movies and reproductions, certainly deserves a visit.
Finally, not too far away, but reachable on a journey of more than a couple of hours by car (not so much as the distance from the air, as for the non-optimal communication routes), you can also reach the resorts of Maratea, the park of Pollino, the lakes of Monticchio, the first beaches of Salento ...