

The Apulian Region

Apulia, located at the southern extremity of Europe and in the centre of the Mediterranean, extending into the sea toward the East, has always been an ideal region for human settlement and an area of commercial and cultural exchange because of its geographic position, its gently sloping terrain and particularly pleasant climate.



Easily accessible by sea or by land, it was exposed to a number of attacks by many and different peoples throughout the centuries. As a result, the history, art and culture of Apulia bear profound marks of the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, French, Spanish and other populations which left indelible traces of their presence.

Profound historical, cultural and geographical environmental diversities distinguish the areas of the Gargano, in the north of the region, the Land of Bari, la Valle d'Itria and the Salento, in the south of the region, which compose the Apulian territory, and which correspond more or less to the present day six provinces of Foggia, Bari, the region's capital city, Barletta-Andria-Trani, Brindisi, Taranto and the world wide known baroque city of Lecce.

The Apulia region has the shape of a heel and extends for 20,000 km square, surrounded by the Adriatic Sea on the east and by the Ionian Sea in the south. It is inhabited by more than 4 million people living mostly in the area around the Land of Bari. The least populated area is the Appennino Dauno corresponding more or less to the Gargano.

The Landscape

The diversity of the Apulian landscape is another peculiar characteristic of its territory. Its coastline stretches for about 800km and alternates rocky beaches to white sandy beaches especially in the south. The thick forests of the north alongside with beautiful lakes give space to



the vast plains of the centre mixed to the Murgia Plateau and the typical grottos around the Land of Bari to change once again the morphology of the countryside in the Valle d'Itria and the Salento with its characteristic " Trulli", whitewashed cone-shaped houses, geometrically outlined fields, olive groves, vineyards with their tidy rows, orchards of almond trees, long lines of dry-stones walls dividing up the space and



finally the "masserie", fortified agricultural villages. The different colours of this splendid countryside : deep blue of the sky and the sea, the red colour of the land, the bright green of the olive trees and the blinding effect of the whitewashed houses give Apulia that peculiar and unique feature which can only be found there.

Let's focus on the Murgia Plateau.

The Murgia Plateau is a vast and hilly territory which occupies the central part of the Apulian Region. The highest peak of the plateau lies in the outmost internal area around the Land of Bari including the town of Andria, where two important hills can be found: one being Mount Caccia, which is the highest peak, 680m above the



sea level, and the other hill is the one where the famous Castel del Monte was built. The Murgia Plateau presents itself as a series of bare stony slopes alternating grottos to caves and "gravine" extending for more than 90.000 hectares. The main feature of the Murgia landscape is its karstic nature which is also the reason of its peculiarity. The word murgia derives from the Latin word *murex* which means sharp stone. The morphology of the Murgia Plateau is the result of a long lasting erosion of the calcareous rock due to the rainy water. Throughout the centuries the carbon dioxide contained in the rainy waters have melted the calcium carbonate of the calcareous rocks of the Murgia thus giving birth to the typical karstic feature of the land: depressions of the ground, grottos, caves, "gravine", "lame", slopes and hills which characterize the



Apulian landscape. The above mentioned chemical process is also responsible for the formation of the so-called "gravine", deep gorges of the ground recognizable for their V-shape and steep walls, or the "lame" kind of rocky gorges in a U-shape, shorter walls and a flat basis.

The "Gurgo"

A peculiar type of gorge can be found in the outskirts of Andria, it is called "Gurgo", a deep gorge of karstic origin which has been recently acknowledged a conservation natural area because of rare species of wild animals,



reptiles, birds and flowers growing there. Among the wild animals and reptiles there are foxes, snakes, green lizards and geckos. We can also find a number of rare wild birds such as magpies, falcons, blackbirds, kestrels and bats. Because of its peculiar micro-climate, humid and rich in mineral salts, we can find plants and flowers which can only grow there such as the wild asparagus, euphorbias, rose hips and hawthorns. In the long run, plants and animals have adapted to the wild environment thus



developing characteristics of their own. There are plants that have toxic substances in their leaves to prevent being eaten by the animals or plants which have their bulb growing underneath the earth such as the orchids, in order to survive to difficult external weather conditions. There are animals which lack of the colour of their skin because the sun has never reached the most internal part of the gorge thus preventing them from getting pigmented.