



Exploring Puglia- Lecce, Valle de Itria & Alberobello!



The lovely city of **Lecce**- a riot of cherubs!- is known as the “Florence of the Baroque”. A period of great prosperity in the 17C led to grand constructions with extravagantly covered facades and doorways, totally “over- the- top”, amusing, astonishing and on such a scale that you are dwarfed and made humble walking through this living museum. We went by train, in typical Italian fashion only 1½ hours late! We ate a lunch of local cheeses and salami and visited the enormous Duomo di Santa Croce, the Roman amphitheatre and wandered past the many museums, churches, and monuments marveling at the strange beasts and wicked angelic faces carved into every available spot.



We also spent a day driving through the peaceful **Valle de Itria** with its olive groves and vineyards dotted with “trulli” and stopped off at some of the “white cities” dotted around on the hilltops- Matina France and Rotondo where we sheltered from the rain over mama’s home-made pasta.



Strangest of them all was **Alberobello**, designated a UNESCO world heritage site for its "trulli", hobbit-like dwellings, a whole town of white-washed, conical-roofed houses built from blocks of local limestone. Their design was typically Italian, designed to fiddle the taxes and fool the authorities and until 1797 used by feudal landlords to house their peasant workers. They could be dismantled quickly and moved and thus were not classed as an inhabited dwelling. The very thick stone walls are constructed without mortar, the roof is a dome and there is generally a central room with arched alcoves leading off. The roofs are often decorated with painted religious or superstitious symbols- a status symbol showing skill of the builder and thus the wealth of the owner. Today they are mainly trendy hotels, souvenir shops or designer homes, but they are fascinating to see. We visited a furnished one with a spy hole through the wall near the entrance so unwelcome visitors could be shot if necessary!



A trulli cake!

Although pleasant in the marina, Brindisi seemed a little run down, a lot of abandoned military bases and active Naval & Air Force Stations, though a nice enough waterfront (and good pizza!) After nearly a week of thunderstorms rolling in one after the other and worsening weather in Croatia, we decided to return to the Ionian islands in Greece. A lovely starry night crossing back to Corfu.

