



THE RISE OF THE SOUTH

Italy's heel kicks up

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BARI

Tourism in southern Italy still finds itself in an embryonic state because of incompetent bureaucrats and backward politicians. So instead of waiting for Rome to pull the south out of the Dark Ages, the southern regions have decided to take tourism development into their own hands.

At the Tour Info Bit 90 trade show in Bari this month, tourism representatives from eight southern Italian regions met with international tour operators and the foreign press, to discuss the future of tourism in southern Italy.

A major concern brought up by U.S. and European tour operators was the lack of highways stemming from Rome to the south—this along with an antiquated train system and few direct flights to the eight

southern capitals. Everyone agreed that the existing airports are in bad need of renovation and expansion; some airports, like Bari's, don't have baggage handlers or carts.

European operators want to see new airports built in the region to cut down on travel time from the city airports to resort areas, but North American tour operators felt their customers would tolerate an hour's bus drive from the airport.

It became obvious that most tour operators wanted something different out of a southern Italian vacation. The Japanese wanted guaranteed punctuality of meals, large shopping areas and museums. The Europeans wanted direct flights and affordable hotels and restaurants. The North American operators said southern Italy can be sold as a new destination, with clean

waters, spacious beaches and good food.

But it's going to be difficult to convince tourists to skip Florence, Venice or Rome and head to relatively unknown, sunnier regions without the well-organized tourist infrastructure found in the north.

In Canada there are three tour operators that have included several southern Italian regions in their summer and winter programs. Vacance Neo-Tours in Montreal has numerous programs to Sicily, Sardegna, Calabria and Puglia. The operator is sending 10,000 Quebecois to Sicily alone. Sardegna is selling well, as is the Santa Caterina resort in Calabria, but the tour operator admits English and French are a problem in Puglia's Giovinazzo resort area. Neo-Tours plans to introduce a ski-Abruzzi package for this winter.

Tempo Travel in Toronto is offering FITs to Calabria and Basilicata this year along with its 15-day Fantastic South journey that hits the Amalfi Coast, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily. Alba Tours has direct charters to Lamezia airport until Oct. 9 using Worldways. Alba's southern Italy programs concentrate on the Naples area and Sicily.

Tiffany Tours in New York, offers a 10-day tour of Puglia's major cities and the Costa Smeralda in Sardegna.

"We'd like to offer Calabria and Basilicata, but I don't think the regions are ready for American tourists yet. American's want showers and hot water—the Basilicata doesn't even have an airport," says Tiffany owner Mina Scaramella.

Despite these infrastructure problems, tourism in southern Italy continues to grow slowly, virtually through word of mouth, but it could grow even faster if the tourism board polished up its PR vehicle, built more hotels and learned to serve tourists in languages other than Italian and German—that's what most press and tour operators in Bari agreed on.



Musical interlude

No bargains in the north

Not only is Venice sinking from the weight of tourists, but it's pricing itself out of the convention market. Its restaurants and hotels are among the costliest in the world, and prices don't appear to be stabilizing.

Fifty-one European Parliament members had scheduled an environmental meeting in Venice this month, but decided against it when they found out the cheapest hotel room available was \$350 a night.

The most expensive hotel in Venice, and maybe just about anywhere, continues to be the Cipriani della Giudecca. A room there costs \$700 a night.

At Tour Info Bit 90, a southern-Italian trade show held in Bari this month, a tourism official said the major problem with northern Italy, especially with Venice, is that there are not enough one- and two-star hotels and not enough affordable eateries.

"It's absolutely ridiculous when a tourist spends more on a coffee and snack in Piazza San Marco than on a cheap pensione."

— A.B.

Unsophisticated Puglia offers glimpse of the past

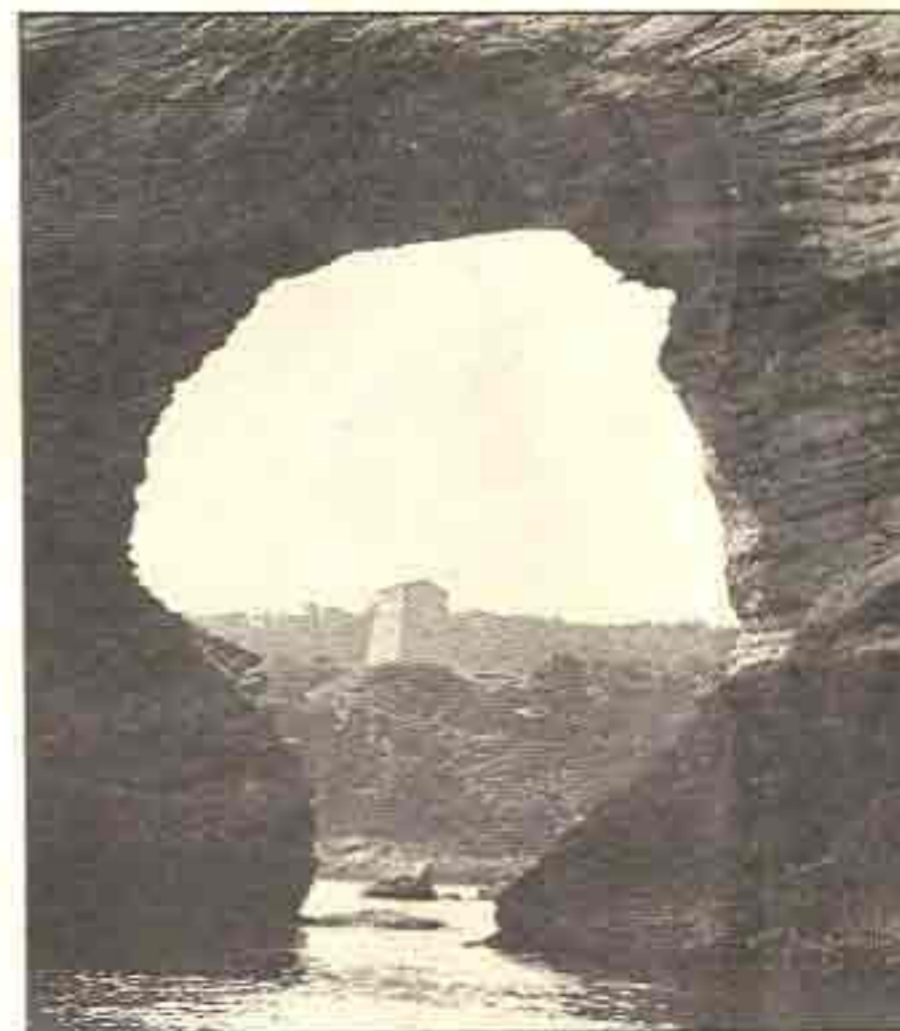
Most tourists and even some Italians don't know there's land below the Rome-Naples highway, and because of their ignorance they're missing out on some of the best history, food and resort areas left in the over-crowded peninsula.

The Puglia region (Italy's heel) has probably one of the best products to offer tourists that want to get away from it all. It definitely doesn't have the sophisticated hotels, impressive museums found in Rome or Florence but it does have a bit of the dolce vita that Rome lost long ago.

The people are unusually quiet and respectful, although their English is a bit rusty. The local food is absolutely great. Broad beans mashed with Swiss chard are typical to the region, orecchiette (ear) pasta is eaten daily, and the seafood is served simple.

The biggest attraction in Puglia are the Trulli, stone homes with cone roofs an hour's drive south of Bari. Two hours north from Bari is the famous Gargano resort area popular with Milanese and Germans. The water is actually clean, with beaches safe to lie on. The mountain roads are not as impressive or as green as Ireland's, but the view is just as breathtaking.

The key spots in the Gargano are the hill top town of Vieste, Pungochiuso, Pizzomunno and Peschici.



The Gargano resort area of southern Italy

SOUTHERN FIGURES

There are currently 1,055,236 hotel beds available for tourists in southern Italy, with another 728,069 beds available in pensiones.

The Campania region has the most hotel space, with 81,331 beds, Sicily has 63,817, Sardegna 45,801, Abruzzi 43,195, Calabria 41,561, Puglia 40,733, Basilicata 7,108 and Molise 3,621.



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A lotta dough

If a dinner roll tends to fill you up before dinner, you'd better avoid this bakery in Monte Santo Angelo. The big bun measures about 3½ feet in diameter.