



It's no longer a secret. Apulia is creating a Grand Tour revival. The southern region in the heel of the Mediterranean boot is a cultural Mecca, and this summer it is the talk at the table. An irresistible alternative to the traditional stops and warmed-over dishes served by its more northern neighbors, last August The New York Times took us on a delectable 36-hour tour into the Baroque alleyways of Lecce, calling it the Florence of the South, and as we all hope, it may soon gain another title as the next European Capital of Culture. Just last week TripAdvisor announced that Puglia won 5 places in the top 10 favorite destinations of Italian travellers, surprisingly even above Sardinia. (The first is London, by the way.) And Italy's culturally rich and most widely read national daily, La Repubblica, dedicated last weekend's entire 24-page summer album travel insert to Puglia.

But if the Italians' first choice is the British capital, a glance at the majestic Norman castles, and Medieval masserie-turned-luxury hotels coloring the covers of travel magazines proves that Salento is the latest trend among the English-speaking elite. And that's just the cover story. Delve within the pages and fine print to decipher one of the wealthiest and variegated cultural heritages still to be discovered and understood to its fullest. If I may dare to be provocative, with great apologies to Tuscany and Neapolitains, it seems to me Salento is now sitting proudly at the head of the table to celebrate her rightful place on the Grand Tour.

So what is all the fuss about this ancient land beyond the Baroque facades, charming hamlets and emerald seas that's making it the top tourist stop of 2014? It is not

SALENTO UNVEILS A CULTURAL MECCA

Land of events Music and poetry



Taranta nights

International artists
lighten up the summer



Bodini at Must

From books to storytelling
literature a shining star

just the Roman amphitheaters set in the shadow of Renaissance marble, nor the messapic vases in a glass display case. Apulia's contemporary culture is alive and vivid, and most importantly it invites us to live it with her. Otherwise known as the land of events, this summer will be like no other. Overflowing with events, the region is in constant motion: international performing arts festivals celebrate everything from film to dance to theatre. Poetry, music, art, dialogue, literature, food and wine, all set against the backdrop of the region's most suggestive architectural gems bridging its archaic history with the living and breathing contemporary culture of today.

The rich roster is not just limited to local talent. As history repeats itself, the territory has always had to share its borders, and it gladly opens them up to a melting pot of talents from across the seas. In Castellana Grotte, the World Dance Movement has just inaugurated its return. From July 6th through 27th, 25 nations experiment, with internationally-acclaimed dancers and instructors. Desmond Richardson, hailed by the New York Times as one of the greatest modern dancers of the current era, will teach alongside

Michèle Assaf, and Stefano De Martino. And it's not just dance that attracts international figures to the region, the director of the Metropolitan Opera of New York, Fabio Luisi will take the podium on the inaugural night of the Festival della Valle d'Itria opening in Martina Franca on July 18th, conducting La Donna Serpente by Alfredo Casella and scenography by Arturo Cirillo. The program is long, going on until August 3rd, but beyond the "Novecento" and sacred music, the bill includes three concerts from Europe thanks to a collaboration with choirs and quartets from Estonia, Sweden, and England.

This weekend's International Short Film Festival, Salento Finibus Terrae, has already begun projecting the final talents of short films in San Vito dei Normanni and surrounding towns. Later this season in the birthplace of Rodolfo Valentino, from July 29th to August 2nd the Castellana Film Festival will be dedicated to new and emerging talents. The Trani Film Festival with 150 works in the running and in its 15th year will award Edoardo Winspeare for "In Grazia di Dio" from August 19th til 23rd. Turning the page back to music, the calendar sings its own



tune from contemporary notes to Salentine reggae, from traditional Taranta to jazz and punk, with several genres mixed into the same evening. Tomorrow in Lecce, jazz and classical debut in an unforgettable show set within the courtyard of Palazzo dei Celestini. Orchestra Ico plays with Italian trumpet player Paolo Fresu and American eclectic composer and jazz artist Uri Caine mix up Gershwin and Beethoven.

New to Lecce but in its 9th edition, the Locomotive Jazz Festival at the month's end is an event which stands alone and in the dark with its concert at sunrise. Its title "Chiaroscuro" and Italian jazz artist Raffaele Casarano invite us on a trip to Tuglie on the historical train. Still in the Baroque capital, the mythical Apulian group, Negramaro, will play at the stadium on July 26th with four other Salentine bands. Later on August 23rd, the by-now famous event, Festival La Notte della Taranta, in Melpignano, will attract thousands in its 17th year, and is one of the most important events of popular culture in Europe.

Last but not least for the literary, there are many events celebrating literature, but for poetry, the highest of all art forms, there is Lecce's very own and versatile poet and translator Vittorio Bodini who illuminated the Baroque like no other, and identified "il Sud" with a particular human condition, not unlike his contemporaries of the American South who had a strong sense of place. The impressive exhibit at the MUST, Museo storico di Lecce runs until August 31st, and is just a pre-

lude to the grand literary and poetry award, Premio Letterario Nazionale Vittorio Bodini on August 30th for the occasion of the centennial of his birth.

And this weekend, further north in Polignano a Mare, the book is the point of departure and the central theme in the festival entitled "Il Libro Possibile", which aims to teach us one of life's greatest pleasures, that of reading, from July 9th to 12th. Parallel to this in Castellana Grotte, is another mini review but with big names: Dario Fo on July 14th, and on July 21st, Vinicio Capossela. Complete program at: www.libropossibile.com. In the same vein, storytelling will be under the lights in Conversano in September with Lector in Fabula. In four days, the magic of oral history will be the star.

This summer, accept Apulia's invitation to not just sing her songs, swim in her seas and stroll in her piazzas, but take a grand tour of all of her cultural abundance, beauty and art, and write home to tell about it!

The Grand Tour revived and revisited