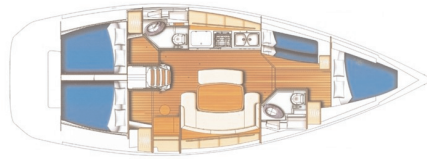


The sailing life for me.....

I first heard about the Puer Apuliae yacht charter company when they contacted me for help with translating their brochure into English. and was pleased that something similar was finally on offer in Puglia. The sea here is so beautiful, and the coastline so varied - what better way to travel and explore the area?

I went to meet Vito Marasciulo and Leonardo Legrottaglie, two of the founder members of Puer Apuliae, and skippers on the yacht, and was very impressed by their enthusiasm and initiative. It was evident that they were not only expert sailors but are familiar with every inch of the Puglian coastline and eager to share its beauty with others. When we met they were awaiting delivery of their first yacht, a luxurious new Benetau Cyclades 43.4, but they offered me a trip as soon as it arrived.



I went away very excited with my head full of possible itineraries. Would I like to sail down to Otranto (about four hours from Brindisi) stopping at the beautiful Porta Foca on the way? I could then go on to Santa Maria di Leuca - the furthestmost tip of Italy, with beaches that could almost be Caribbean, and sail round to Gallipoli. Yes, that sounded lovely, but I was also rather taken with almost every other itinerary they suggested (including hopping over to Greece - only a day's sailing).

In the final event, a badly timed flu bug and hectic work schedules, both on my side and theirs, meant that there was only time for a quick day trip - but I'm already dreaming of an autumn cruise.....

On the day of departure I went down to Brindisi to meet the boat with a very over excited 8 and 13 year old as well as a rather more blasé (but still quietly expectant) 20 year old and friend. In all there were five of us but we could have comfortably taken another couple of friends. The boat sleeps 8 in 4 cabins - 3 double

cabins and one with bunk beds, and there is shaded seating outside as well as in the main cabin.

When we arrived at Brindisi we went on board and decided to just sail to the nature reserve of Torre Guaceto and back, as we didn't have that much time and the sea was, unusually, quite rough particularly coming out of Brindisi harbour. Within no time at all the older members of the party were sitting on deck enjoying a cold drink, watching fish jumping out of the water, feeling the sun and wind on our faces and generally beginning to feel like this was the life.

Jamie (8) was far too excited to sit still but this wasn't a problem either, as Leonardo soon had him 'driving' the boat. Max (13) was more interested in setting up the on-board fishing rod and fantasising about catching tuna (at the very least). He didn't actually catch anything during our trip but enjoyed helping hoist the sails and learning how to steer a course and follow the wind. Both Vito and Leonardo were endlessly patient with the boys - on a longer trip they could have really learned how to sail.

When we got to Torre Guaceto we decided to swim from the boat rather than go in to land. It always feels like a great luxury swimming in solitary splendour and looking back at the crowds on the beach, but swimming from boats can involve an uncomfortable and undignified scramble in and out of the water. This time it was incredibly easy. Jamie swam in a rubber ring which Leonardo helpfully tied to the boat on a long rope for safety.

Back on deck we headed home again. At just the right moment some chilled white wine and taralli arrived, followed by delicious pasta. We began to fantasise about not going home again and hijacking the yacht.....All too soon we landed back at Brindisi, but will definitely be back for a longer trip as soon as possible...

Puer Apuliae offer custom made sailing holidays and the yacht can be chartered with or without a skipper and/or hostess. Prices start at 775E for two nights (+130E a day for a skipper). Day trips are available off-season. Contact Welcome to Puglia for details (see p) or visit www.puera-pulia.com.

