

Ressort: Tourismus

## Matera, the city in the stone

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Matheola is one of the oldest cities in the world to have been inhabited, with settlements dating back to about 10,000 years ago (inhabited from the Paleolithic up to our days); the third in the world after Aleppo in Syria and Jericho in the Cisgiordania. This is the most exceptional and intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region.

The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera include a complex of houses, churches, monasteries and hermitages built in the natural caves of the Murgia. With an area over 1,000 hectares, it contains more than a thousand houses. The first settlements are those of the Murgia (deep karst gorge crossed by the Gravina stream) where there are the prehistoric villages of Murgia Timone and Murgecchia. The dwellings were the caves carved into the rock. The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera include a complex of houses, churches, monasteries and hermitages built in the natural caves of the Murgia.

The first settlements are those of the Murgia (deep karst gorge crossed by the Gravina stream) where there are the prehistoric villages of Murgia Timone and Murgecchia. The dwellings were the caves carved into the rock. With the progress of civilization, the tuff blocks of the Murgia Materana were used for the city built "above ground". The "two cities", the excavated and the built one, started a long cohabitation that still lasts. Starting from the 8th century, the hermit monks and Benedictine and Byzantine Greek monastic communities began to arrive. The latter, in particular, brought from the places of origin (Cappadocia, Anatolia, Armenia, etc.) a culture of living in the cave that merged with a population already experienced in the excavation of the tuff.

The inhabitants of the Sassi have continued to build "above ground", using the caves as deposits, cellars and stables. The city had relations with the Magna Graecia and in Roman times it became a center of passage and supply of wheat. It was disputed by the Lombards, by the Byzantines and by the Saracens, followed by the Normans and the Aragonese. The urban structure is formed by tangled "cave-houses" forming the two main districts of the historical center: Sasso Caveoso and Sasso Barisano divided by the Civita, the oldest part. The typical dwelling inside the Sassi is excavated on three levels and includes: the stable, the cellar and the cistern.

The ownership of the Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches is bound by the national regulation for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage (Legislative Decree 42/2004, code of cultural heritage and landscape). This national regulation requires the prior approval of the competent Superintendencies of

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the Local Offices of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, for any intervention or activity that has an impact on property.

Most of the historical area is owned by the State and leased to the Municipality of Matera pursuant to Law 771/1986. The law delegates to the Municipality the direct responsibility for managing the historical area. The law 771/1986.

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