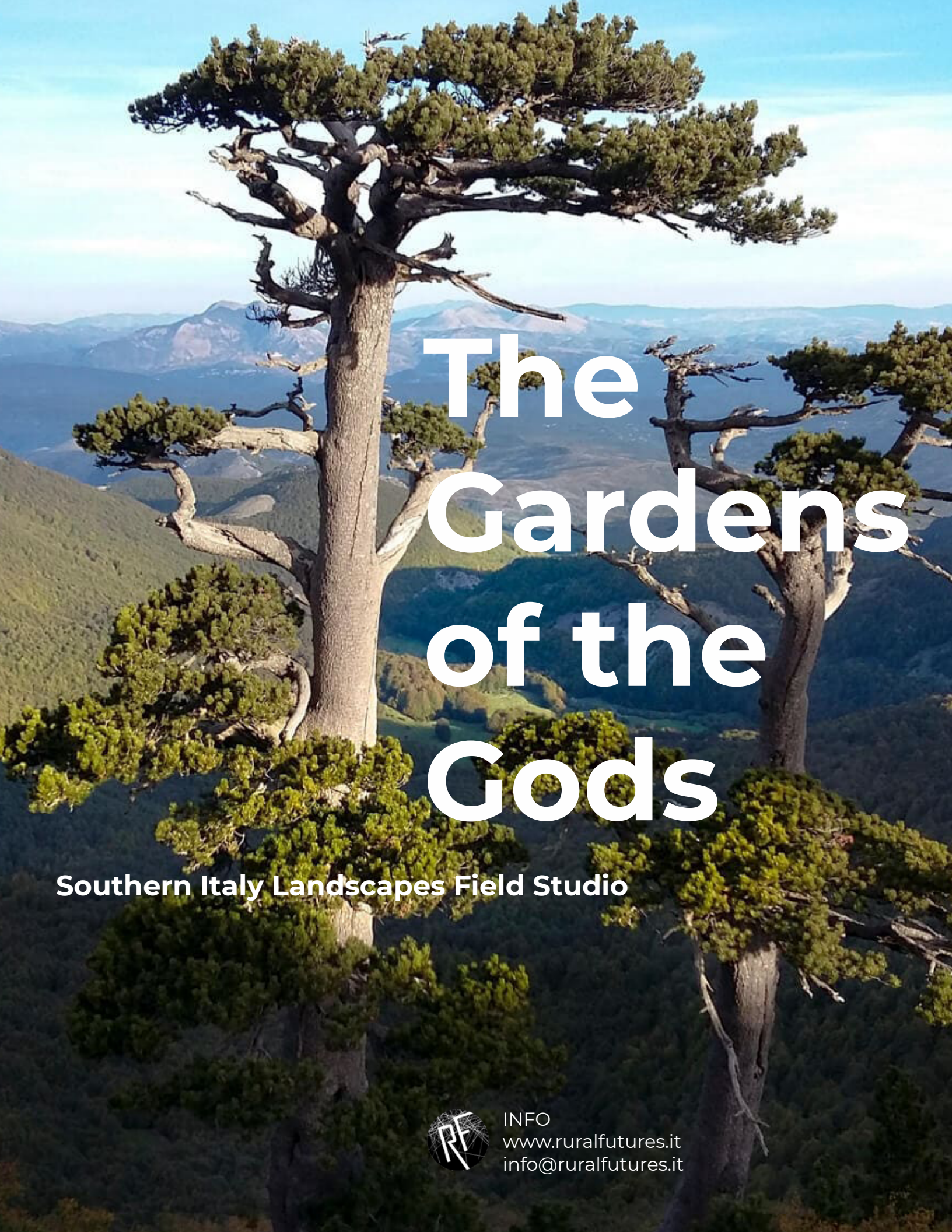




The Gardens of the Gods

Southern Italy Landscapes Field Studio



INFO
www.ruralfutures.it
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Program Description:

This two-week intensive field program introduces students to the layered landscapes of Southern Italy through a curated sequence of site visits and studio-based inquiry spanning Naples, Capri, Paestum, Padula, Laino Castello, and the Pollino National Park. Students will examine historic monastic gardens and cloisters, botanical collections, royal parkland, archaeological landscapes, and protected mountain environments. The itinerary foregrounds Mediterranean plant communities—especially *macchia mediterranea*—alongside riparian corridors, vineyard and olive-growing cultural landscapes, and the high-altitude ecosystems of Pollino, including the iconic *pino loricato* (Bosnian pine). Field sketching, observational methods, and guided interpretation support a rigorous, design-informed reading of place across urban, rural, and wilderness contexts. All included meals are grounded in the Mediterranean diet and are designed as place-based learning experiences, featuring seasonal local products and curated “slow food” tastings.

Locations:

Napoli, Capri, Paestum, Padula, Pollino National Park, Civita, Papasidero, Laino Borgo, Laino Castello, Caserta, Italy

Program Terms: Summer

Type of Program: Intensive Course Abroad (2 Week Program)

Instructors:

Luca Guido

Clark Stevens

Program Calendar

Arrival Date: May 18/2026

Departure Date: May 31/2026

Students will need to leave on Sunday, May 17, 2026 (or before) from the USA to arrive in Naples on Monday, May the 18, 2026

Program Overview:

Structured as a mobile seminar and field studio, the program combines expert-led visits, intensive workshops in Laino Castello, and sustained landscape observation across Campania and the Pollino region.

Students will compare designed landscapes (the Naples Botanical Garden, monastic complexes such as Santa Chiara and the charterhouses, and the Royal Palace gardens at Caserta) with “working” agrarian territories and vernacular settlements, and with protected environments including canyon systems, river valleys, and mountain forests. The curriculum emphasizes methods in landscape history, ecological literacy, and site interpretation—using mapping, sketching, and field notes to connect vegetation structure, geomorphology, and cultural practices. Special attention is given to Mediterranean scrub formations, endemic and relict species, and Pollino’s distinctive bioclimatic gradients, culminating in studio synthesis that translates field evidence into academically grounded landscape analysis and design insight.



The Gardens of the Gods signals the cultural and historical depth—and the monumental scale—of the landscapes visited, many of which are rooted in the legacy of Magna Graecia. Moving across designed gardens and royal parks, monastic and archaeological landscapes, and national-park ecologies, the itinerary traces places that have inspired myth, ritual, and imagination from the ancient Mediterranean to the present.

NOTE: This program will entail a considerable amount of walking in natural, rural and urban environments and is not recommended for anyone who is uncomfortable near rivers, woods or is afraid of heights. Please be prepared and bring with you hiking boots or hiking shoes to wear while walking along hiking trails in the Pollino National Park. In addition, please remember to bring with you other kinds of shoes to wear while in the classroom and visiting the city.

APPLICATION DEADLINE
March 20th

[Click here to download the Application Form](#)

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Tentative itinerary and activities



Day 1

Monday, May 18

Arrival Date

Independent arrival at Hotel (airport pick up not included but available on request)

Meeting at Hotel in [Napoli](#) at 6:00 pm

Guided walk of the city

Welcome Dinner at 8:00 pm

Day 2

Tuesday, May 19

Breakfast and Orientation

Guided Tour of the [Botanical Garden](#) and [Santa Chiara cloister](#)

Lunch on your own

Guided tour of: [San Martino Charterhouse](#) (view of the Bay of Naples), Via Toledo and Piazza Plebiscito, [Napoli](#) Waterfront

Dinner on your own

Day 3

Wednesday, May 20

Breakfast

Transfer to [Capri](#)

Guided Tour of the Island

Lunch box

Students are free to enjoy and discover the Island and its beaches

Return to Naples and dinner on your own



Capri, I Faraglioni from Punta Tragara



Capri, Via Krupp, the famous footpath connecting the Gardens of Augustus area with Marina Piccola



The Archeological Park of Paestum contains three of the best-preserved ancient Greek temples in the world

Day 4

Thursday, May 21

Breakfast

Bus Departure from Naples to Paestum

Visit of the [Archeological Park of Paestum](#)

Lunch at [Vannulo Farm](#)

Bus Departure from Paestum to [Padula](#)

Visit of Padula Charterhouse

Bus Departure from Padula to Laino Castello

Arrival to Laino Castello

Accommodation and Welcome Dinner

Day 5

Friday, May 22

Breakfast

Orientation and Meeting with the Mayor and local administrators/stakeholders

Guided Tour of [Laino Castello](#)

Lunch

Discovering of local flora, sketching and in class activities

Guest lecture

Dinner

Day 6

Saturday, May 23

Breakfast

Guided tour of [Laino Borgo](#) (Historic center, Lao river, archeological area)

Rafting activities (weather- and safety-dependent)

Lunch

Visit of Santuario delle Cappelle in Laino Borgo

Return to Laino Castello and Dinner

Day 7

Sunday, May 24

Breakfast

Field trip_ Pollino National Park

Guided visit of Mormanno,

[Pollino National Park visiting center](#)

Lunch

Guided visit of [Civita](#) (Raganello Canyon Natural Reserve and Devil's bridge)

Guided tour of Tenute Ferrocinto (vineyard walk, refinement cellar, tasting of wines, oil and local products)

Return to Laino Castello and Dinner





Papasidero, Church of Santa Maria di Costantinopoli and Lao river



Civita and a portion of the Raganello Canyon



Papasidero, a village along the Lao river

Day 8

Monday, May 25

Breakfast

Field Trip_ [Pollino National Park](#)

Hiking activities (weather- and safety-dependent)

Visit of "[Giardino degli Dei](#)"

Lunch box

Hiking activities (weather- and safety-dependent)

Return to Laino Castello and Dinner



Pollino National Park, entering the Gardens of the Gods

Day 9

Tuesday, May 26

Breakfast

Landscape workshop in [Laino Castello](#)

Lunch

Landscape workshop in Laino Castello

Dinner



Pollino National Park, vineyard

Day 10

Wednesday, May 27

Breakfast

Field Trip_ [The Romito Cave](#): Origins of Civilization

Landscapes

Lunch

Guided tour of Papasidero and its rural paths
(weather- and safety-dependent)

Return to Laino Castello and Dinner



Papasidero, Romito Cave

Day 11

Thursday, May 28

Breakfast

Landscape workshop in [Laino Castello](#)

Lunch

Landscape workshop in Laino Castello

Dinner

Day 12

Friday, May 29

Breakfast

Landscape workshop in Laino Castello

Lunch

Landscape workshop in Laino Castello

Dinner



Rafting on the Lao river



Laino Castello, the old town

Day 13

Saturday, May 30

Breakfast and apartment check-out

Departure from Laino

Transfers to Caserta

Guided tour of the [Royal Palace in Caserta and its gardens](#)

Lunch box

Transfer to Napoli

Hotel check-in

End of program and dinner on your own

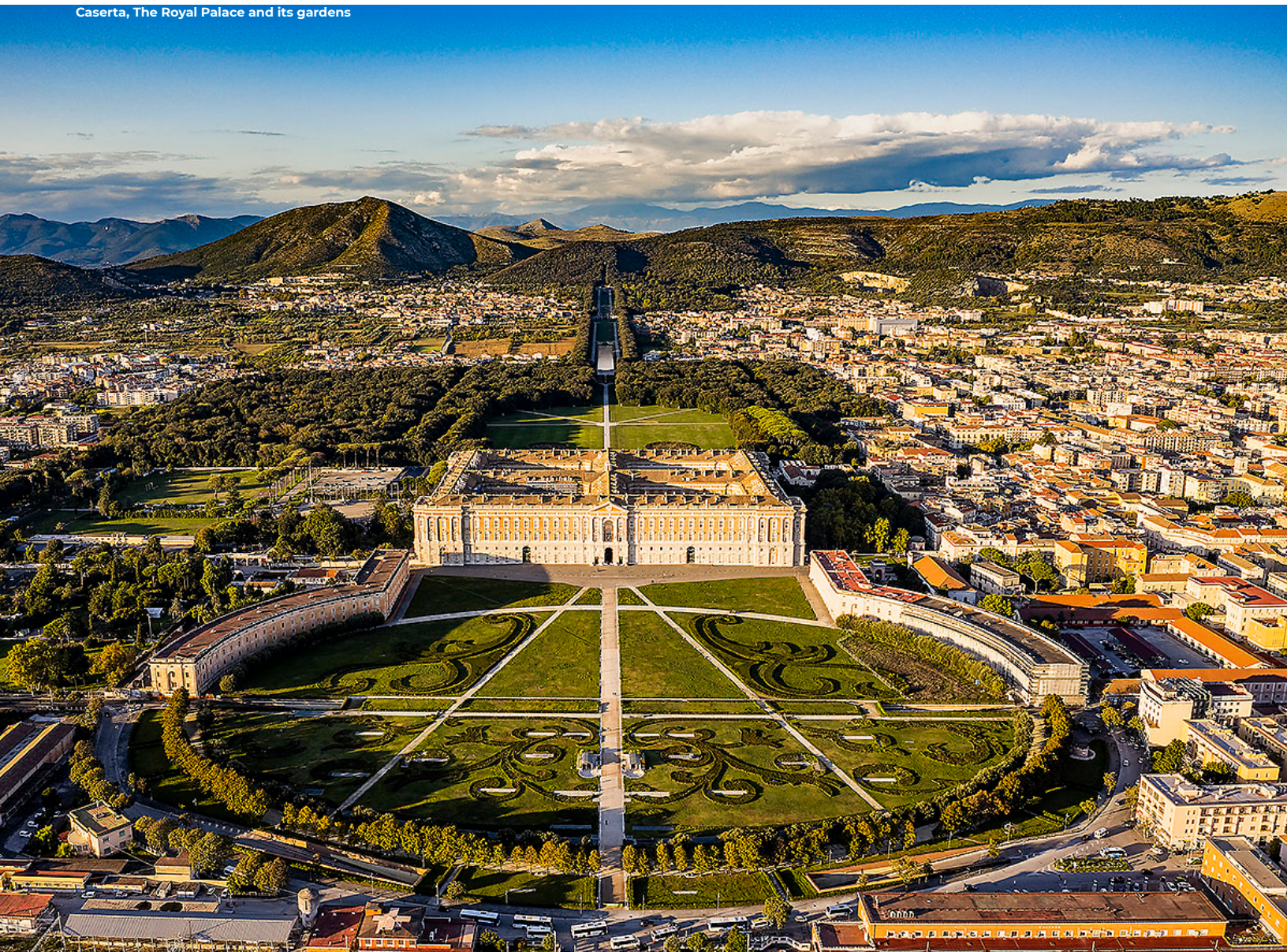
Day 14

Sunday, May 31

Departure Date

Independent departures (airport transfer not included)

Caserta, The Royal Palace and its gardens



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Program Fee:	\$ 6800
Due March 20th, 2026	\$ 800 Advance Payment
Due April 15th, 2026	\$ 6000 Final Payment

All payments are non-refundable unless declined admission or program cancels for unforeseen reasons.

Included in Program Fee:

In-country transportation by private van/bus and driver
Guides for all scheduled excursions
Expert guide/resident specialist fees and entrance fees to all sites
Scheduled activities
Accommodation in double to quadruple occupancy in private apartments or Hotels with private bathrooms
Breakfasts, lunches and dinners as described in the calendar/program
On Call Emergency Assistance

Not Included in Program Fee (Approximate):

Round-trip airfare: \$ 1500
2 Airport transfers: \$ 80
Spending money: \$ 500
Meals not specified in the itinerary: \$ 150 (lunches/dinners on your own as described in the calendar/program)
Visa and Passport
Any extras not detailed in the "included" section

Housing and Meals:

Students will be provided rooms in hotels and in friendly run establishment apartments located in the historical center of Laino Castello. That informal, cozy atmosphere makes them feel relaxed and at home while they will experience living in an ancient village not affected by mass tourism, pollution or other modern issues. This unique opportunity will allow the students to reconnect with the natural environment and the beauty of an enchanted, ancient rural village. The apartments are spartan but equipped with all necessary appliances and benefit from the views and fresh air of Pollino National Park. Cleaned daily and fresh bedding and towels provided. Students will have time to explore the closest villages and will be accompanied to local stores, pharmacies and grocery stores/supermarket. The on-site restaurant will be serving breakfast, lunches and dinner. The variety of dishes served represents the famous Mediterranean Diet, prepared daily with local fresh products.

Is a visa required for US citizens?

American citizens are not required to have a visa for this program. Students of other nationalities should confirm visa requirements on the Italian Embassy website.

Rural Futures is an international study abroad institution that develops academic and research programmes in Italy for foreign students and universities. We design courses and summer schools, promote conferences, exhibitions, and cultural initiatives, and support partner institutions in the development of tailored educational pathways.

Rural Futures

Learning from the countryside to improve the future of cities

Rural Futures is grounded in the vision that Italy's rural areas constitute a crucial laboratory for rethinking the relationship between the built environment and nature, and for testing new approaches to the stewardship and transformation of places. Our mission is to advance knowledge, research, and education on historical-artistic, agricultural, and natural heritage by fostering dialogue among students, researchers, institutions, territories, and local communities. We work to develop replicable models for landscape protection and management and for heritage enhancement, thereby contributing to the creation of cities and human settlements that are more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Through international educational programmes and field-based experimentation, we translate design ideas and conservation practices into tangible pathways capable of integrating cultural, ecological, and social dimensions.

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