

1,500 trulli houses located in the small town of Alberobello are considered a historic site because of their history dating back to the 14th century. While the actual construction of the first trulli houses began around 1,000 years ago, some say that the design originated between the 5th-8th century B.C. since they mimic the Greek burial chambers of that period.

Originally built as temporary shelters or storehouses, they have evolved into clustered units to create a special type of dwelling. Built atop an area comprised of mostly limestone, water needed to be captured before it drained away to the underground rivers winding to the Adriatic Sea. Thus, a cistern would be excavated and the limestone would be used to create the structure atop the water storage.

This architecture, according to legend, grew out of the need to dismantle the trulli quickly when the “tax man” was coming to assess properties. The dry-stone building technique proved a necessity for the subsistence land-owners to avoid as much taxation as possible.

With its thick walls, single-story tradition and necessity, the trullo essentially lives as a rural building type. In today’s urban settings, the need for population density in a small building footprint dictates that these buildings remain in the countryside.

In the countryside, trullo domes were built singly (usually to hold livestock), in groups of up to five or sometimes in large farmyard clusters of a dozen or more that would house a single rural family.

Along with its exterior wall, a trullo's interior rooms were covered with lime plaster and whitewashed for protection against drafts. Those used for human occupancy would also feature an open fireplace with a flue hidden into the masonry and often a stone-built chimney rising well above the roof.

The roofs were constructed in two stages. The first layer was an inner skin of limestone layered in a circular wedge pattern and then an exterior layer of limestone slabs resembling traditional roof shingles were added starting from the bottom and going up to create an extremely watertight system.



The Stone Huts of Apulia



As stated earlier, the trullo may be a single circular shape or the circles combined to create a square arrangement yielding a kitchen, bedroom, living space, store-room and animal shelter.

Other interesting features of these buildings are the “pinnacolo” (pinnacle) and the “simbol” (whitewashed symbol). The pinnacolo are hand carved sandstone landmarks fixed to the top of the conical roof. The symbols are said to identify the stone mason who created the structure.

The painting of symbols on the roof are reported as 19th century additions. These symbols are mostly religious in nature - a cross, a cross over a pierced heart, a dove. As the area grows in popularity among tourists, we see newly painted trullo symbols reflecting non-religious themes.

