

## Why Puglia's palazzi hotels are perfect for a post-lockdown holiday



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By Kate Bolton  
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With its long summers and even longer coastlines, Puglia offers the perfect antidote to weeks of lockdown under Fair Albion's grey skies. The many glitterati seduced by this area in recent years has transformed the once stout and sensible heart of Italy into a chic and sexy subject.

Reflecting its new look, the latest hotel trends here breathe contemporary style into historic palazzi – stately residences from the heyday of Apulian splendour.

To escape the holiday crowds, head down to Gagliano del Capo, just a pebble's throw from the cape that divides the Adriatic and Ionian seas. From the headland, on a clear day, you can see the little Greek island of Othonoi and the Albanian coast. Gagliano is well off the tourist radar – an isolated place to laze in the adagio rhythms of provincial Italian life.

The grandest building in town, Palazzo Daniele, opened to visitors last year, though from the moment you knock at its monumental doors where any form of hotel sign is conspicuous in its absence, you'll feel less like a tourist and more like a guest of the owner. Francesco Petrucci – a Gatsby-like figure who lives in a wing of the palace, “among the whispertings and the champagne” – inherited this imposing porticoed pile from his ancestors, the patrician Daniele family. Built at the end of the Risorgimento – the revolutionary period so poignantly evoked in Lamprera's novel (and Vincent's film) *The Leopard* – the place has a wistful nobility; lingering here is like entering the pages of the book, where “Everything must change, so everything can stay the same.”

To transform his ancestral home into a boutique residence, Petrucci collaborated with Gabriele Salini, founder of the US Collection of hotels. Their aim: “to create a sense of ‘contemporary nostalgia’ in which avant-garde art and installations inhabit the cool, echoing, 19th-century salons. Here, art is not merely for art's sake, it is also functional: photographic lightboxes by Simon d'Enix illuminate the rooms. Peter Burro's site-specific works on ceiling wallpaper fill the salons' grandiose silence; you can even shower in a baptismal “living art” installation.



Avant-garde art and installations inhabit the cool, echoing, 19th-century salons of Palazzo Daniele (left: contemporary)

### • The best hotels in Puglia

The conversion, by Milan stylists Ludovica and Roberto Palomba, celebrates “the sanctity of absence”. With minimalist designer furnishings, the building narrates its own story through family crests on mosaic floors, neoclassical frescoes and art nouveau murals. A lace-draped altar in the red-damasked chapel is now an honesty bar, the noon in Holy Spirit's bedrooms are harmonised in scale, monastic in their simplicity; distressed walls in chalky or putty colours bear the scars of time; open steel-framed wardrobes, no TVs or mirrors. Everything enhances the sense of space and Petrucci's guiding principle: *Questa casa non è un albergo*. (“This house is not a hotel”).

Social distancing is easy in the ample and airy salons, and in its walled gardens, fragrant with jasmine and citrus blossom, where you can muse in the *bijou* Kaffeehaus folly or take a dip in the pool. “Our exclusiveness and attention to detail are the key elements for the safety of our guests during these uncertain times,” says Salini. Eager to make the palazzo “a gateway to the community”, staff can arrange experiences that immerse you in Puglia's traditions: catch sea urchins with a local fisherman, cook Salentino specialities with earth-mother chef Donata Bizzo, or visit the annual *Capo d'Arte* contemporary art exhibition curated in venues around town.

A couple of hours' drive along the rocky east coast will take you to Otranto, the ancient “White City” founded by the Greeks, set in biblical olive groves and edged by the Adriatic Sea. Here, the newly opened *Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa* occupies a stately classical palazzo. Painted in Pompeian red, it harks it over the lime-washed medieval street.



Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa occupies a stately classical palazzo in the white city of Otranto

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## • The best masseria hotels in Puglia

When the current owners, Pascale Lauber and Ulrike Bauschke, bought the place in 2016, Ottavio Palazzo Rosso had been abandoned for more than 40 years. They found a shell of cracked walls and crumbling plaster, rotten wood and rusty iron. "But the building was simply too beautiful to stay hidden!" they recall. In the long restoration process, local artisans uncovered the original frescoes and restored period features using traditional methods. A spa was born from an underground water cistern, and the tangled overgrowth outside transformed into urban-lawned gardens complete with a swimming pool and a shady colonnade for al fresco dining.

Lauber's theatrical flair pervades the interiors, and the 11 individually curated suites are like Baroque opera sets. Frescoed grotesques, swirling arabesques and biblical narratives are the backdrop for Puglian carved-wood armoires, desks and commodes. The scenographic rooms are named after their jewel-like colours: Amber, Amethyst, Opal, Poppy and Lapis Lazuli. Lauber's favourite is Onyx, done in dramatic shades of black.

The place is animated with personal mementos from Lauber and Bauschke's itinerant lives: spice-coloured sofas and bedheads from South Africa, lotus flower lamps from Thailand, antique Argentinian tin plates, and here & there from English flea markets. There are some delightfully whimsical touches, too: waistcoated wooden monkey caviar cart on the bar; statues of the Seven Dwarfs (Lauber's take on the garden gnomes) pose outside. "We left Snow White behind, she was far too ugly!" laughs Bauschke.



The quality of the food at Paragon 700 Hotel & Spa is Michelin-worthy (see [season review](#)).

## • The best family-friendly hotels in Puglia

Quirky contemporary art by Suzanne Lignery and Giuseppe Ciraci deck the walls, and there's not a TV screen in sight. For Lauber, the hotel is more than just a physical space: "It's all about movement, and the way people interact with the place," she gestures. To that end, the kitchen and dining areas are casually choreographed, with head chef Giovanni Cerroni and his team serving and introducing the food – the quality of which should surely earn Cerroni a Michelin star or two. "I see the hotel as a total concept, not just one of aesthetic beauty," Lauber reflects. "Everything has to work together." And so, in this beguilingly eclectic city, it does.

### The details

Palazzo Daniele, Corso Umberto I, 63, Galliano del Capo 800 39 08 335 3385; [palazzodaniele.com](http://palazzodaniele.com). Double rooms from €350 (£319) in low season and from €650 in high. Nearest airport: Brindisi (72 miles).

Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa, Largo Michele Ayroldi Carosimo, 14, Ostuni 080 39 0832 30020; [paragon700.com](http://paragon700.com). Double rooms from €250 in low season and from €500 in high. (Minimum age: 14). Nearest airport: Brindisi (24 miles).

In light of Covid-19, both hotels apply stringent practices around food handling, sanitisation, disinfection and cleaning to protect guests and staff.

• For the latest on travel to Italy, see [here](#).

## More palazzo hotels to book in Puglia

### Palazzo Bozzi Corso, Lecce

The operatic Baroque city of Lecce makes the perfect entrée into between Galliano del Capo and Ostuni. In the heart of the old town, the 18th-century Palazzo Bozzi Corso offers palatial suites and an exotic walled courtyard shaded by palms and romantically lit by a 1000 lights. Gracing the lofty interiors are 20th-century paintings and sculptures that tell the fascinating story of the owners, Antonio and Giacomo Flah, and their artistic ancestors. Several times a week, in-house cook Maria Carla Pennetta offers gourmet evenings when you can dine on Apulian fare.

Double from €495 (£450). Via Umberto I, 38, 73040 Lecce 080 39 0822 660000; [palazzo-bozzi-corso.com](http://palazzo-bozzi-corso.com)



Palazzo Bozzi Corso is in the Baroque city of Lecce.

### Palazzi Maritati and Muci, Nardò

French chef Guy Martin's sense of taste finds expression not only in his Michelin-starred Parisian restaurant, Le Grand Véfour, but also in his restoration of two 18th-century palaces in Nardò, Puglia. Martin and his wife, Katharina Marx, have created an ode to idleness in their greenhouse, forging 10 breezy rooms and suites from Palazzo Maritati – a symphony of dancing whites – and Palazzo Muci, whose curved arches hint at Nardò's Byzantine past.

Double rooms from €225 (£214). Palazzo Muci, Via Calafati, 38, Nardò and Palazzo Maritati, Via Giovan Bernardino Tallar, 7, Nardò 080 39 427 790 4632; [maritatomuci.com](http://maritatomuci.com)



Palazzo Maritati in Nardò's Byzantine past offers a relaxing escape.