

1 – BARI

What does St Nicholas, patron saint of Bari, have in common with Santa Claus? The story of Nicolaos, a 4th-century bishop of Myra (Lycia, now Turkey), is a long one; his remains, stolen by three ships from Bari in 1087, have remained irrevocably “anchored” to the capital of Puglia. Patron saint of children, legend has it that he gave gold to three young girls to prevent their father from forcing them into prostitution. In the Netherlands, Saint Nicholas became Sinterklaas, a figure who brought gifts between 5 and 6 December – the date of the saint’s feast day. Dutch settlers brought this tradition to New Amsterdam (New York); only later, through a linguistic shift, did the name change from Sinterklaas to Santa Claus, though the tradition of bringing gifts remained unchanged, merely sliding forward in time – from 6 December to the more widely celebrated Christmas. Hence the unusual link connecting a bishop from Asia Minor in the late Roman Empire to the capital of Apulia, extending to a festival such as Christmas, now celebrated in a globalised world not only within the Christian sphere. Bari nevertheless continues to dedicate heartfelt celebrations to its patron saint on 6 December, and also in May, with the Historical Procession of the Caravella.

In the city, we can admire the Cittadella Nicolaiana, with the Basilica dedicated to the patron saint, and the Romanesque Cathedral of San Sabino, which constitute an authoritative example of “Apulia Romanesque”, dating from the late 11th century and represented by other splendid examples in the Bari area, such as the Cathedrals of Bisceglie, Giovinazzo, Bitonto and Trani, as well as later examples, such as the Cathedral of Ruvo di Puglia – dating back to the time of Frederick II – and the Holy Sepulchre of Barletta – from the late 13th century, already showing Burgundian Gothic influences.

The city’s pride is Italy’s longest seafront promenade (perhaps this is where the nursery rhyme originates: ‘If Paris had the sea, it would be a little Bari...?’), flanked by majestic buildings. The city has two faces: the elegant Murat district and the mesmerising Bari Vecchia, which started its redevelopment in the 2000s with European funds that have restored the Romanesque heritage and renovated run-down areas to improve the quality of life for some 8,000 residents. The regeneration has continued with other waterfront projects (the redevelopment of the Bari Vecchia seafront) and cultural enhancement initiatives, transforming the previously neglected area into a tourist and social hub.

Promotion of the city stems from the Apulia Film Commission’s support for the very recent RAI series *L’Avvocato* Guido Guerrieri, based on Gianrico Carofiglio’s famous legal thrillers and starring Alessandro Gassman; the drama presents a Bari which, although serving as a backdrop to the on-screen action, remains authentically present throughout. A mission through film tourism similar to what the 1000 Miglia aims to achieve in the regions crossed by the 1000 Miglia Experience Italy 2026.

However, on a tour of Apulia following the race, what can we savour of the local cuisine, inevitably influenced by the produce of the hinterland and the bounty of the sea? Homemade pasta, rustic pizzas and panzerotti, first and foremost, vegetable soups where

broad beans, chicory and chickpeas take centre stage. And then there is the fish, with arrancate anchovies (boned, layered and seasoned with oil, garlic, mint, capers and oregano), baby octopus in a casserole, and red snapper with olives. Among the meat dishes, made with lamb, there are tacche (bombette) – traditional street food rolls made with thin slices of stuffed capocollo (coppa), rolled up and cooked over hot coals; and ‘gnummeriedd’ – lamb offal intertwined with other offal. And then, with pork, there are capocolli, sausages, and brasciole alla barese – lean meat rolls stuffed with ham. Among the desserts, there are torroncini, callume – a sweet black pudding – and castagnedde – almond pastries. Not to be forgotten is the region’s rich wine production, with numerous PDO wines represented by Castel del Monte, Gioia del Colle and Gravina; among the fortified wines, Aleatico di Puglia, completing a picture that testifies to the importance of winemaking in the Bari area, and in the region in general.

2 - POLIGNANO A MARE

Not everyone knows that Polignano was the birthplace in 1928 of Domenico Modugno, ambassador of Italian music around the world thanks to his song Volare, with its famous refrain “nel blu dipinto di blu”, which was undoubtedly inspired by the sea of his hometown. He is commemorated by a bronze statue of him by the Argentine sculptor Hermann Mejer, now a popular selfie spot for the town’s many visitors. With his hair blowing in the wind and his arms outstretched as if embracing his hometown, he certainly captivates visitors who lose themselves in an “infinite gaze” at the “Pearl of the Adriatic Sea”, as Polignano is known.

The town is certainly remarkable in terms of its landscape: situated at the foot of the Murge hills, it features high cliffs, “carved” by numerous caves of marine karst origin, and a coastline with turquoise waters that ranks among the most beautiful in Apulia, so much so that in 2025 it received the prestigious Blue Flag award for the 18th consecutive year, a mark of quality for its crystal-clear waters and the services offered.

The town is crossed by a deep river gorge, the Lama Monachile, a testament to the many seasonal watercourses typical of Apulia, a region so lacking in surface water resources. Along the rugged coastline, the Grotta Palazzese is well worth a visit (from land), named after the “Palazzo” above it – the residence of the Miani counts; it comprises two chambers and is renowned for its green and blue hues. Several tour operators, on the other hand, offer boat trips that allow visitors to appreciate the many coastal caves from a different perspective: the Ardito, once accessible via a tunnel, and those of Monache, Colombi, Sella and Foca. Some of these are important palaeoanthropological sites, having yielded evidence of Neanderthals, prehistoric fauna and Neolithic burials.

The historic centre is definitely worth a visit, with traces of Arab, Byzantine, Spanish and Norman influences, and the remains of the four defensive towers perched high above the cliffs; from the Arco Marchesale, once the sole access route to the historic centre, the visitor enters the village, through whitewashed alleyways, flower-filled courtyards and loggias opening onto the sea, until reaching the Chiesa Matrice, consecrated in 1295 but remodelled on several occasions. The oriental charm is provided by the network of narrow streets, set amongst whitewashed buildings or those with the warm tones of the local calcarenite stone. Also worthy of note is the “Pino Pascali” Museum Foundation, housed



in the former Municipal Slaughterhouse, dedicated to the work of the great sculptor and artist from Apulia.

Two kilometres from Polignano towards Bari lies the village of San Vito, dominated by the abbey of the same name, built by Basilian monks fleeing the East in the Early Middle Ages. According to tradition, the ship carrying the relics of the body of Saint Vitus, the patron saint of Polignano, landed on these shores in 801. The patron saint's festival on 14 June is unique, involving a procession by sea carrying the saint's statue from San Vito to the town centre, disembarking at Cala Paura, where the faithful await it.

When it comes to Polignano's cuisine, fish and seafood naturally take centre stage, served in the many restaurants, some of which boast picturesque settings on the cliffs or in caves. Among the local specialities, the colourful San Vito Carrot, protected by Slow Food, is particularly worth mentioning. Finally, before setting off again for the 1000 Miglia Experience Italy 2026, it is well worth stopping for the "sandwich" with roasted octopus, stracciatella, cherry tomatoes and rocket, and a "special coffee" prepared in a historic ice-cream parlour in Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi with coffee, cream, lemon zest and amaretto made from ground sweet almonds.

3 – ALBEROBELLO

An iconic destination and one of the world's most famous sites for trulli – those distinctive dry-stone structures with walls whitewashed with quicklime and grey, cone-shaped roofs covered with exposed stone slabs known as *chiancarelle*. Although their archaic form recalls the Mycenaean tholos tombs or the nuraghi of Sardinia, the trulli actually date back to the 15th century. The roofs often bear inscriptions with mythological or religious significance and are topped with a decorative pinnacle designed to ward off evil influences or bad luck. In a region with scarce rainfall, water is collected via eaves protruding from the base of the roof, to be stored in a cistern beneath the building. This unique construction technique stems from a decree of the Kingdom of Naples in 1536 – the 'Prammatica De Baronibus' – which imposed a royal tax on every new building and required authorisation for new settlements. To evade this tax, the local feudal lords, the Counts of Conversano, forced the peasants to build the trulli using the "dry stone" method, meaning they could be easily dismantled in the event of a royal inspection.

The historic centre of Alberobello is a maze of winding alleys and boasts more than 1,000 trulli scattered between the Rione Monti – the oldest district in the town – and the Rione Aia Piccola – where wheat was threshed and cleaned; here stands Casa Pezzolla, a complex of 15 interconnected trulli, now used as the Museum of the Territory. Worth noting is the Church of Sant'Antonio, designed in 1926 in the shape of a trullo with a Greek cross plan and a 21-metre dome, and the Minor Basilica of Saints Medici and Damiano, founded in the early 17th century on the site of an older place of worship; behind it stands the Trullo Sovrano, a two-storey building dating from the 18th century, which hosts performances and concerts.

Since 1996, Alberobello has been recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, but it is also an Orange Flag municipality, an environmental tourism label awarded by the Italian Touring Club that recognises hospitable communities which protect local heritage and enliven their areas through the organisation of events. Since 1984, it has hosted – usually



on the first weekend of August – the “Città dei Trulli” International Folk Festival, which sees the participation of international folk groups from various countries every year.

The agricultural landscape of the Itria Valley, in which Alberobello – in silvam arboris belli – is situated, is characterised by olive groves, almond orchards and vineyards, surrounded by characteristic dry-stone walls made of limestone, sometimes bordered by sparse oak trees of a species endemic to Apulia and Basilicata, the Macedonian oak. Farm produce inevitably influences the local cuisine, served in the area’s many restaurants and featuring handmade orecchiette, broad bean and chicory purée, flavourful seasonal vegetables, meatballs and roast meats; for a quick lunch, we recommend focaccia, panzerotti and stuffed pucce.

The surrounding landscape is agricultural but also shaped by karst phenomena, both on the surface and underground; a must-see are the Castellana Caves, carved into the limestone of the Murge dei Trulli. Located 15 km from Alberobello, they constitute the most important cave system in Europe; first explored in the late 1700s by three local youths, they extend for over 3 km and reach a maximum depth of 72 metres. However, to admire the landscapes of the Itria Valley dotted with trulli, it is worth making the 9 km journey to Locorotondo, the charming village with its circular layout and white houses – the cummerse – featuring their characteristic sloping roofs.

4 – BRINDISI

Here, arriving from Rome after a route originally spanning 350 Roman miles, is the Regina Viarum – the Via Appia – the No. 1 in the nomenclature of state roads. Reviving its ancient fame in the pages of La Repubblica was the travelogue completed in 2015 by the journalist Rumiz, who succeeded in rekindling interest in the ancient road, once travelled by pilgrims of the past and present alike as the Southern Francigena towards Jerusalem. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2024, two columns (actually just one, as only the remains of the base of the second are left) mark its conclusion in the city, complete with a spectacular flight of steps descending towards the sea.

According to the geographer Strabo, Brindisi takes its name from the Messapian word “Brunda”, meaning “deer’s head”, due to the shape formed by the two “bays” – to the west and to the east – which are wedged into the coastline to form a natural harbour. While its geographical location has, over the centuries, fostered the city’s commercial vocation as a gateway to the East and the European terminus of the “Valigia delle Indie” – the international route linking London to Bombay – today Brindisi serves as a departure point for the many holidaymakers heading to Greece and Albania.

The visitor enters the historic centre through the 12th-century Porta Mesagne, for a visit to the church of S. Giovanni al Sepolcro, an 11th/12th-century Romanesque building, and to the Cathedral which, although remodelled in the 18th-century style, has Romanesque foundations and boasts an important 12th-century floor around the altar, and the 16th-century walnut choir of the canons, the work of local woodcarvers. No less impressive is the Swabian Castle, founded by Frederick II but extended with four towers during the Aragonese period. On the other side of the Ponente bay stands the gigantic Monument to the Sailor, a fine example of Rationalist architecture; shaped like a rudder and standing



53 metres tall, its panoramic terrace offers a superb view of the city skyline, the port and the Adriatic Sea.

The environmental value of the coastline is evidenced by the Torre Guaceto Nature Reserve, which also protects the seashore through the Marine Protected Area of the same name, 17 km from the city. It features a variety of habitats which, moving inland from the sea, include not only coastal dunes but also Mediterranean scrub and wetlands, extending to a centuries-old olive grove from which an excellent organic extra virgin olive oil is produced.

After all that walking around, doesn't your appetite start to kick in? For a quick bite, why not try a frittata: a calzone – fried, as the name suggests – stuffed with mozzarella and tomato, a classic street food. However, for a proper sit-down meal, the traditional cuisine reflects the city's location, nestled between the inland and the sea. To start with, there's fresh pasta, handmade from durum wheat flour and available in many shapes, first and foremost orecchiette topped with a ragù of meat rolls. Among the vegetables, in addition to beans, chickpeas and lentils, the Brindisi artichoke and flavoured lampascioni deserve a mention; a must-try is the broad bean purée with wild chicory, served with toasted bread (fave `ncapriate). And more: the taiedda (pan) of rice, potatoes and mussels, grilled fish or fresh fish soups, stuffed cuttlefish, octopus alla pignata, mussels, horse meat rolls (brasciole), or lamb or kid offal on the spit (turcinieddi). There is no shortage of cheeses: caciocavallo made from the milk of Podolica cows, cacio ricotta and caciotta. Olive oil, durum wheat bread and friselle are a must. The desserts are made with almonds, such as cupeta (toasted almond nougat), and the biscuit from Ceglie Messapica, or coated in chocolate (mustuazzueli). And then there are pasticciotti, filled with cream and black cherry or chocolate, to be enjoyed with almond milk or a laurel liqueur. There is no shortage of wines, produced exclusively from Negroamaro and Malvasia Nera grapes, with the Brindisi DOC wines available in Rosso, Rosso Riserva and Rosato varieties. Finally, weather permitting in spring, before setting off for the next legs of the 1000 Miglia Experience Italy 2026, you could enjoy an iced coffee with almond milk!

5 – LECCE

Lecce, the capital of Salento and of Lecce Baroque, is a fusion of architecture and sculpture thanks to its local stone – known locally as "leccisu" – a soft, easily workable calcarenite that has allowed this style to flourish in the city. Flowers and wreaths, statues of saints, cherubs and ornamental motifs adorn the main buildings and the façades of the many churches in the historic centre, characterised by winding streets and intimate little squares, perfectly enclosed by the perimeter of the ancient walls through which the three ancient gateways open: Rudiae, San Biagio and Napoli. Upon entering, we find remnants of the Roman era in the form of the Amphitheatre, and in the square of Sant'Oronzo – the city's patron saint – the column of the same name erected in his honour. Fine examples of Lecce Baroque include the Church of Santa Croce, the Cathedral with the adjacent Seminary, and the Government Palazzo. Just outside the city walls, among the most significant examples of Romanesque art in Apulia, stands the church of San Cataldo, whose façade is a Baroque reconstruction adorned with statues of saints resting on corbels. The portal and rose window are medieval, preserved in memory of the benefactor



Tancredi d'Altavilla, who survived a shipwreck, and still retain their original sculptural ornamentation.

In the ancient artisan workshops of the town centre, the art of papier-mâché dominates, a technique dating back to the 17th century, when the construction boom of Baroque churches and buildings compelled local artisans to use humble raw materials to create statues of saints, Jesus and the Virgin Mary. However, we also find artisans working with Lecce stone, shaped into vases and planters, small ornaments and home accessories.

Lecce is a place of deep devotion to Saint Oronzo, to whom the festival between 24 and 26 August is dedicated, featuring a characteristic procession with the saint's statue through the city centre and the unmissable fireworks display.

The local cuisine, typically Mediterranean, is characterised by handmade pasta, vegetables and lamb; so here we have ciceri e tria – fresh pasta made with semolina flour, partly boiled and partly fried, served with chickpeas cooked with bay leaves and flavourful wild vegetables; not to be missed are the broad bean and chicory purée and the melanzanata – a variation on the classic parmigiana. Among the meat dishes are kid and lamb, and pieces of horse in sauce. There is no shortage of street food, with the puccia, the Salento-style sandwich made from a dough of durum wheat and semolina, richly-filled, traditionally with tomato, capers and olives – and scapece – small fish known as "pupiddi", first fried and then preserved in a marinade made of several layers of bread soaked in vinegar, with the addition of saffron. Among the desserts, the pasticciotto, created from a pastry chef's mistake who successfully reused shortcrust pastry and cream previously left over from a cake, and the spumone, with a hard ice-cream exterior and a soft sponge cake centre. Perhaps it is a little too early in the season for the drivers of the 1000 Miglia Experience Italy 2026 to sample some good Lecce coffee? A hot espresso poured over ice cubes and mixed with almond milk syrup: a summer ritual for the people of Lecce!

The Salento region has traditionally been associated with tarantism – the effects of a tarantula bite and the associated remedies, including a frenzied dance accompanied by lively music played on castanets, tambourines and tin cymbals. It has become a phenomenon of supranational significance following the establishment in 1998 of the Notte della Taranta festival, which culminates in the Concertone at the end of August in Melpignano.

Also noteworthy in the Grecia Salentina area, a Greek-speaking linguistic enclave, is the intangible heritage of Griko, written in the Latin alphabet, which shares features with Modern Greek and includes words influenced by Lecce or, in any case, Neo-Latin; of Magna Graecian or Byzantine origin, the phrase 'Kalòs ìrtate' (welcome) on the signs of some municipalities in the area is particularly striking.

6 – TARANTO

The City of the Two Seas is geographically defined by the two basins of the Mar Piccolo – the inner bay – and the Mar Grande – the outer bay, separated from the Ionian Sea by the Cheradi Islands and harbour breakwaters.

Taranto, a Doric city and the only Spartan colony outside Greek borders, later a medieval settlement, then destroyed by the Saracens in the 10th century and rebuilt by the



Byzantines in the 11th century, is a city that saw the coffin of the Stupor mundi – Frederick II – set sail for its final resting place in Palermo Cathedral. The National Archaeological Museum, second in southern Italy only to that of Naples, with its rich heritage of goldsmithing represented by the Gold of Taranto collection, is an essential stop for understanding Magna Graecia from prehistoric times. Between the 4th and 1st centuries BC, Taranto's goldsmiths produced jewellery of great refinement and decorative quality; generally found in tombs as grave goods, the most notable pieces include boat-shaped earrings, in various designs, testifying to the importance of jewellery worn by the women of Taranto.

Moving from archaeology to a major feat of mechanical engineering, Taranto inaugurated in 1887 the swing bridge over the canal linking the Mar Piccolo and the Mar Grande, dug in the 15th century. Passing initially by the Aragonese Castle, which guards the western end of the canal, we enter the maze of narrow streets heading towards the Cathedral of San Cataldo, with its Baroque façade and sides that reveal the original Romanesque structure, and then on to the church of San Domenico Maggiore, with its Gothic portal and Romanesque rose window. At the head of Via Dante, in the 20th-century part of the city, stands the Co-Cathedral, designed in 1971 by the architect Giò Ponti, a modern reinterpretation of Gothic architecture.

The Holy Week celebrations are deeply felt in the town, as is the Festival of San Cataldo in May, featuring a picturesque procession of the saint out to sea, accompanied by fishing boats, fireworks and the warm participation of the local community.

Taranto, on the other hand, is at the centre of a heated debate regarding the environmental remediation of the former ILVA steelworks, which have been in operation since the 1960s; problematic attempts are currently underway to convert the site for the production of "green" steel, in line with the principles of ecological transition and industrial decarbonisation.

Environmentally, the Taranto hinterland is characterised by Quaternary marine terraces arranged in an amphitheatre at different elevations, furrowed by the Gravine, which deeply cut into the limestone plateau of the Murge. The nearby Terra delle Gravine Regional Nature Park protects its historical, cultural, landscape and natural features: here we find agroecosystems with centuries-old olive groves under extensive cultivation, arable land, pastures, steppe habitats, forests of Macedonian oak, downy oak and holm oak, Mediterranean scrub and garrigue, right through to rocky environments and wetlands.

Seafood reigns supreme in the city's culinary scene, and here we have the Tarantello, a prized cut of bluefin tuna, tender and full of flavour; and the Cozze arraganate, mussels stuffed with a mixture of breadcrumbs or the soft inside of bread, pecorino cheese, garlic, parsley, pepper and sometimes egg, then baked au gratin in the oven. Among the first courses are Chiancaredde – Taranto-style orecchiette served with tomato sauce, and cacioricotta cheese; tubettini with mussels; tiella with rice, potatoes and mussels; and finally, a mutton soup traditionally prepared during the Christmas period. Among the meat dishes, Cervellata, a fresh sausage, usually fine-grained, made with pork, beef and sometimes goat; the Taranto-style Bombette originate from the Itria Valley. Then there are the unmissable takeaway dishes, such as panzerotti, Puccia alla vampa, and Pettole, available in a savoury version with anchovies, cherry tomatoes and capers, and a sweet version. Among the DOC wines are Lizzano, Martina Franca and Primitivo Manduria, as well



as the well-known Amaro San Marzano, produced since 1840. All excellent reasons to make a stop before heading off for the race!

7 - S. MARIA DI LEUCA

We are at the tip of the heel of Italy, the Finibus terrae where the Adriatic and Ionian Seas meet; Leuca, from the Greek "leucos", meaning white, referring to the snow-white limestone rocks of its cliffs.

Legend tells of St Peter's landing at Leuca, who found the place so pleasant that he called it the "antechamber of Paradise". It was here that he began his work of conversion to Christianity: in front of the Basilica of Santa Maria de Finibus Terrae, a conversion of a former temple dedicated to Minerva, stands a Roman column known as the "Croce Pietrina", which traditionally marks the spot where the Saint preached. The Basilica, fortified in the 18th century to defend against Saracen attacks, dominates the rocky headland of Punta Meliso, from which the Greek islands can be glimpsed on the horizon, evoking the nearness of the East. A short walk away lies the end of the Apulia Aqueduct, featuring a striking monumental waterfall flanked by a double-flight staircase, inaugurated during the Fascist era and now open only on exceptional occasions.

The present-day town stands on the ruins of the ancient temple, dominated by the 47-metre-high lighthouse; along the seafront we find elegant buildings in Art Nouveau or eclectic Moorish styles; the blue pagoda roof of Villa Episcopo stands out, as do the red towers of the neo-Gothic Palazzo Mellacqua, the red and yellow striped dome of Villa Meridiana, the Egyptian style of Villa Mariuccia and the extravagant Moorish features of Villa Daniele.

The coastline between Otranto and Leuca, just eighty kilometres from the Balkans, offers habitats where numerous species have found refuge and an ideal place to thrive. It is protected by the Costa Otranto-Santa Maria di Leuca-Bosco di Tricase Regional Nature Park, which is home to rare plant and animal species, some of which are endemic, whilst others are found only on the two shores of the Adriatic Sea. Karst phenomena and the erosive action of the sea have also contributed to the formation of coastal caves, some of which have been inhabited since Neolithic times. A boat trip to the Devil's, Nativity and Dragon caves is certainly not to be missed. The seabed off Leuca is also a paradise for divers and snorkelling enthusiasts.

And in the surrounding area, to round off the fleeting glimpse of the 1000 Miglia Experience Italy 2026? Patù, with its Romanesque church of S. Giovanni and the "Cento pietre", a unique medieval funerary monument with a rectangular plan and a gabled roof formed from Messapian megalithic boulders. Alessano, for the Renaissance-style architecture of Palazzo Legari, one of the best-preserved in Salento; Palazzo Sangiovanni, with its diamond-pointed rusticated façade; the ducal palace and the imposing Baroque-style Collegiate Church. Finally, Tricase, originally founded through the union of three hamlets that joined forces to withstand Saracen attacks: in the beautiful square stands the 16th-century Principi Gallone Castle, the Matrice church and the church of San Domenico, among the seven architectural gems of Lecce.

And if you are planning to take a break, what should you try before setting off again from Finibus terrae? The sea obviously influences the local cuisine, with typical Salento



specialities: pupiddhri (small fried and marinated fish), orecchiette with fish ragù, and octopus alla pignata. The simpler traditional dishes of Salento are also a must: "Ciceri e Tria", "Pittule", "Pitta" with vegetables, freselle and stuffed rustici.

8 – OSTUNI

The White City, the Queen of Olive Trees or the Nativity City, as it is known, lies on the southern edge of the Murge; spread across three hills, the highest of which is the medieval Rione di Terra, with its network of narrow streets, stairways, flying buttresses and tall houses cascading down the slopes. The characteristic whitewashed colour of the old town, still strictly maintained by the residents, has various reasons: for defensive purposes. The sunlight, reflecting off the white walls of the houses, was intended to blind enemies approaching from the sea. To bring light to the narrow, dark alleys of the town, and for hygienic reasons, to prevent any kind of contagion following the plague of 1656 and after a period of drought.

At the heart of the town stands the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, a late Gothic building with a façade featuring three-pointed arch portals, characterised by a large 24-ray rose window of rare beauty. In the same small square stand the 18th-century buildings of the Bishop's Palace, which houses the Diocesan Museum, showcasing the significant historical and artistic heritage of the Church of Ostuni, and the old Seminary, linked by the picturesque Scoppa Arch. Churches and stately homes line the old town, enclosed by the Aragonese walls, where Porta Nova and Porta San Demetrio open onto the streets.

In Piazza della Libertà stands the column of Sant'Oronzo, the city's patron saint, erected in the Baroque style after the plague of 1740 and rising to a height of over twenty metres. Popular devotion gives rise, at the end of August, to the Cavalcade of Sant'Oronzo, in which the horsemen, in sumptuous red and white uniforms and headgear topped with a red plume, accompany the silver statue of the saint. The celebration is, of course, accompanied by illuminations, markets (zagaredde) and various shows.

The countryside around Ostuni is characterised by its stunning scenery, dotted with olive groves and farmhouses, some of which are historic and have now been transformed into charming residences following careful restoration. Some are fortified – built to defend the ancient fiefdoms – including Santa Caterina with its tall octagonal tower, Lo Spagnulo (dating back to 1660), Cappuccini with its trulli, and Ayroldi.

Two kilometres from the town, the Archaeological and Natural Park of S. Maria di Agnano bears witness to the area's palaeoanthropological heritage: the fossilised skeleton of a young pregnant woman, dating back some 28,000 years, was found here, along with the foetus and a rich grave goods collection. From the animal remains found here, in particular those of horses and aurochs, it can be inferred that the site was a favoured settlement in the Palaeolithic era, linked to the hunting of such prey as they passed through from the inland pastures to the grassland and marshland areas.

The town is just eight kilometres from the coast, and between Ostuni and Fasano lies the Dune Costiere Regional Nature Park: covering some 1,100 hectares along the eight-kilometre coastline, it is home to habitats including sandy beaches, dunes, wetlands populated by migratory birds, stretches of Mediterranean scrub and salt marshes. The



farmsteads within the park produce organic extra virgin olive oil, helping to preserve the landscape of the centuries-old olive groves found here.

The unspoilt beaches thus form a mosaic of great environmental value; for this reason, and for the quality of its waters, sustainable management, beach facilities and the cleanliness of the coastline, the town was awarded the prestigious Blue Flag for the thirty-first time in 2025.

9 – GALLIPOLI

From the Greek kalè polis, the “beautiful city” but also the “Pearl of the Ionian Sea”, with its city walls overlooking the sea, its towers and its castle, Anxa, of Messapian origin and later a Greek colony of Taranto, is divided between the Old Town – built on a limestone island, connected to the city by a bridge – and the modern town situated on a promontory with a distinctive wedge-shaped outline.

The square-plan Angevin castle, which controlled the port, retains its cylindrical corner towers, whilst in front of the fortress stands the Greek Fountain, featuring classical-era bas-reliefs and a later Baroque-era frame. At the highest point of the village, amidst the dense urban fabric, the Cathedral dedicated to Saint Agatha suddenly comes into view; it is influenced by Lecce Baroque but features Renaissance elements inside. The façade, in warm Lecce stone, is divided into two orders and features statues and Baroque motifs; the interior has a Latin cross plan, and the three naves are divided by wide arches supported by columns. Also not to be missed are the churches of San Domenico, with its lively façade, and San Francesco; the Church of the Purità, built thanks to the generosity of the port stevedores in the 17th century, contains a pictorial cycle depicting the Old and New Testaments and a rich ceramic floor with floral decoration.

Also in the village is Palazzo Balsamo, an interesting example of a Baroque-style town house, with skilfully decorated cornices and architectural features, and the 16th-century Palazzo Granafei, with splendid Renaissance windows, which houses an oil mill equipped with 17th-century presses and a millstone.

The Carnival tradition is very much alive, one of the best known in Apulia, featuring a parade of papier-mâché floats and masked groups. The typical mask in the procession is the young Titoru (Teodoro), who, according to tradition, died from an overindulgence in meatballs shortly before the fasting imposed by Lent. His stuffed corpse, placed on a hearse, is surrounded by a swarm of “chiangimorti” who perform a light-hearted theatrical display of wailing. The tradition is heralded by Le Focaredde, the bonfires that light up the start of Carnival in honour of Saint Anthony the Abbot (known as “de lu focu”). To soak up the local atmosphere, the authentic fish market – situated in the castle’s original moat – is well worth a visit; it is also a great place to join the locals in snapping up the catch of the day. From here, it is easy to head to the restaurants in the historic centre to sample the seafood specialities: the local purple prawns, the exquisite Gallipoli-style fish soup and, in the street food category, “scapece”.

A stroll along the Riviera, which runs along the inner side of the walls, offers beautiful views of the sea ahead and the coastline protected by the Punta Pizzo and Isola di Sant'Andrea Regional Coastal Nature Park. La Punta features an interesting mix of habitats comprising beaches, Mediterranean scrub, Mediterranean pseudo-steppes and wetlands,



home to a variety of plant species: from arbutus to thorny broom, from myrtle to mastic, from rosemary to thyme, right through to orchids and marigolds. The wetlands offer the chance to observe aquatic birdlife, notably the black-winged stilt, whilst the island of Sant'Andrea, opposite the village, is home to the Cretan seagull, the only known population in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas.

10 – OTRANTO

Otranto, Gateway to the East: from its lighthouse at Punta Palascia – situated at the easternmost point of the Italian peninsula, just 70 kilometres from Albania – we can admire the sunrise before anywhere else in Italy.

We enter the historic centre through the unique Porta Alfonsina, a juxtaposition of two circular towers, commissioned by Alfonso of Aragon, who began the construction of the mighty walls following the massacre of the 800 martyrs of Hydruntum – from Hidruntum, the name of Otranto in the ancient Messapian Greek settlement. In 1480, following the city's surrender after a two-week siege by the Turkish fleet, the inhabitants refused to convert to Islam and were massacred. The Feast of the Holy Martyrs of Otranto commemorates them with particular devotion every year, from 13 to 15 August.

Beyond the walls stands the remarkable Aragonese castle, dating from the late 15th century, with a pentagonal plan, three towers and spear-point bastions, offering splendid views of the town and the sea from the top. A truly outstanding example of Apulian Romanesque art is the Cathedral, the largest in Apulia, with its magnificent religious-themed mosaic floor, created in the second half of the 12th century. The curious visitor should not miss a visit to the Diocesan Museum, housed in the adjacent 16th-century Palazzo Lopez, nor to the Church of San Pietro, dating from the Byzantine period, with a Greek cross plan and three naves, which preserves important frescoes from the 10th to the 16th centuries.

Just outside the town, in the Valle delle Memorie, at the heart of an area characterised by archaeological and anthropological remains dating back to the early Christian era, lies the Torre Pinta hypogeum. According to the most widely accepted theory, this was a site used for funerary rites before the advent of Christianity and was later transformed into a place of worship by the early Christian communities.

And after all that culture, how about a culinary break? The menu features typical Salento fare: ciceri e tria, sagne 'ncannulate – a long, rolled pasta served with fresh tomato sauce and ricotta. Among the main courses, seafood options include: octopus in a clay pot, purple prawns and fish – including a raw version; meat dishes feature turcinieddhri – lamb rolls. Takeaway food is a must, featuring stuffed pastries, pittule and frise. Among the desserts are the famous pasticciotto and the fruttone – a shortcrust pastry filled with almond paste and jam.

In the vicinity of Otranto, a geological curiosity is the former bauxite quarry, a destination for keen photographers due to the striking colour contrasts between the red of the soil – caused by iron pigments – and the small lake fed by the water table – with its emerald-coloured waters. Porto Badisco, on the other hand, takes us back to the mythological landing place of Aeneas; it preserves Neolithic menhirs and the Grotta dei Cervi. With few realistic elements (including the scene of a deer hunter assisted by two dogs – the reason



for the cave's name), it is known as the Sistine Chapel of Prehistory due to its 3,000 pictograms (concentric circles, spirals, crosses, stars, parallel lines, ...) – mostly painted in black – using mainly subfossil bat guano, and to a lesser extent in red – executed with iron-rich ochre.

To the south of Otranto, the Costa Otranto - S. Maria Leuca - Bosco Tricase Regional Nature Park protects over fifty kilometres of coastline and an area of 3,200 hectares, with landscapes ranging from terraced olive groves to cliffs plunging into the sea. Ideas for walks from Otranto's Porta a Mare towards the Palascia lighthouse, or for longer hikes along the coast towards Porto Badisco as far as Santa Cesarea Terme. At the entrance to the park stands the Torre del Serpe, an old lighthouse of Roman origin, now partly in ruins; the municipal coat of arms of Otranto, featuring a snake coiled around the tower, recalls the legend of the monster that rose from the depths of the sea to drink the oil from the lighthouse, thus extinguishing the light that guided sailors at sea and causing their deaths.



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