

Travel

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

By **Kate Bolton**
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Palazzo Daniele

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 heel of Italy into a chic and sexy stiletto.

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 indolent 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 a hotel sign is conspicuous in its absence), you'll feel less like a tourist and more like a guest of the super-Erosacea Petrusei – a Gatsby-like figure who lives in a wing of the palace

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"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 lords it over the lime-washed medieval citadel.



Paragon 700 Boutique Hotel & Spa

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When the current owners, Pascale Lauber and Ulrike Bauschke, bought the place in 2016, Ostuni's 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 renovation process, local artisans uncovered the original frescoes and restored period features using traditional methods. A spa was hewn 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, Topaz 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 bric-a-brac from English flea markets. There are some delightfully whimsical touches, too: waistcoated wooden monkeys cavort on the bar; statues of the Seven Dwarfs (Lauber's take on the garden gnome) pose outside: "We left Snow White behind; she was far too ugly!" laughs Bauschke.



Paragon 700 Hotel & Spa

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Quirky contemporary art by Suzanne Lipsey 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, 60, Gagliano del Capo (00 39 08 335 33185; 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 Carissimo, 14, Ostuni (00 39 0831 369219; 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](#)

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