

INVENTORY: Road trip

# Sunrise coast Salento

Salento, the tip of the sun-drenched peninsula making up the heel of Italy's 'boot', is home to stunning beaches, architectural delights and family-run firms. And, as we discover on a three-day road trip, this charming outpost is also a very difficult place to leave behind.

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Salento, at the very farthest point of Italy's heel, has long been a relatively isolated landing point for people from across the Mediterranean: many of whom have left their mark on its rugged culture and cuisine. There's also something about Salento that seems to capture visitors' imagination and lend itself to dream of putting down more permanent roots.

The landscape is a dramatic mix of azure waters and craggy cliffs, and even the dwellings themselves seem spawned from fantasy – clustered towns of dazzling limewashed buildings or sun-bleached pastel hues to the blocky limestone *masserie* (farmhouses). That's before visitors spot the ancient-looking *trulli* (stone huts with coned roofs) or *pajare* (stout pyramids) like Mayan temples. Then there are the many quiet beaches, restaurants and places to take a dip.

Our three-day journey takes in the best of the remote region, from the Adriatic Sea at the east, circling through the nethermost edge – “De Finibus Terrae” (“End of the Earth”), as the Romans called it – and to the Ionian sea at the west. *Andiamo!* —

## Day 1: Lecce and the Adriatic coast

Lecce, one of Puglia's biggest cities, has a shade under 100,000 souls but enough bisque-coloured baroque stone edifices to more than justify its moniker of the “Florence of the South”. The city has recently become a favourite of tourists but locals still pace the old city centre with a gelato from Pasticceria Natale (served with roasted almonds) or a

béchamel-and-mozzarella pastry from Bar Cotognata Leccese. Those in the know stop in Caffè Alvino for a cream-filled *pasticcotto* pastry and a caffè *leccese*: coffee served on ice with almond milk (a long-standing rather than a hipster touch here). At Trattoria Le Zie, the second-generation business that started in the owners' living room in 1966 continues to turn out rustic Pugliese classics including *ciceri e trie* (chickpeas with fresh and fried pasta). Artisans still occupy some of the storefronts, including Nassi Lamps, where a team handcrafts contemporary and custom lampshades, and Ijò Design, where architect-turned-weaver Annalisa Surace makes fabrics on a 19th-century loom. Her next project? Staff uniforms at the area's newest city-centre draw: Palazzo Luce.

“I wasn't looking to buy a palazzo,” says Anna Maria Enselmi, Palazzo Luce's founder. “Someone brought me to see this place and I fell in love.” From there, Enselmi dreamed up her own architecture project, transforming the



1. Cliff-jumping near Tricase
2. Lecce's 1912 Teatro Apollo
3. Lounge at Palazzo Daniele
4. Room at Palazzo Luce
5. Alessio Manza (on left) and Carlo Lanzini run Masseria Moroseta
6. Porto Ciolo beach



The road trip  
Three days in southern Italy



14th-century palazzo of an aristocratic family into a hotel and space to house her collection of design and art.

Alongside Nina Yashar, the doyenne behind Milan's Nilufar gallery, Enselmi enlisted the help of the gallerists Lia Rumma and Rossella Colombari, and a network of Italian design talents including Storage Milano, Giuliano Andrea Dell'Uva Architetti and Martino Gamper to decorate the space. Gamper contributed various custom pieces and the hotel's bar, finished with fragments of green and white linoleum. Guests will also spot furnishings from Carlo Mollino, Franco Albini, Luigi Caccia Dominioni, Osvaldo Borsani and Ettore Sottsass alongside photos by Marina Abramovic and Vanessa Beecroft, in addition to a vast rug by Joseph Kosuth covering the music room.

Enselmi's mania for all things Gio Ponti includes headboards, shelves, painted-yellow floor tiles, Superleggera chairs and pink and moss-green porcelain toilets, with matching bathroom fixtures. Enselmi eyes a lacquered wood



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table by Ponti with concern. “I hope that no one ever puts a hot cup on here,” she says. “But I think guests will be respectful of the specialness of the place.” Her worry is understandable: Palazzo Luce is not like other hotels and made for the wear and tear of strangers. It’s a temple to Enselmi’s passions that she entrusts, rather than rents, to visitors.

Enselmi, who is of Pugliese descent and lives in Milan, explains that it was her “philosophy to maintain as much as possible of what remained here”: fishbone cotto floors, hand-painted majolica tiles, carved wooden doors painted with dainty flowers and other remnants of its 700 years of life. “I wanted a place for contemporary art and design, but with a soul and a past — a place specific to Puglia that could never exist in New York or London,” she says. What better place to rest for the night?

**Day 2:  
De Finibus Terrae — the eastern  
Adriatic coast**

Leaving Palazzo Luce, we head along the rocky Adriatic shoreline for Salento’s sunrise coast. At Grotta della Poesia, half an hour southeast of the city, the waves have carved a perfect pool into the low cliffs of pale stone. A few kilometres further down, the long scythe of sand of Torre dell’Orso is flanked by a lighthouse at either edge and dense copses of umbrella pines at its back — a beautiful but crowded beach in high summer, when locals tell me that they opt for more secluded coves nearby. At the Torre Sant’Andrea, the *faraglioni*, or sea stacks whittled by the rough waters into curving towers of rock, are a humbling sight to behold — a graceful and wave-racked ode to the elements.

Almost at the very tip of Salento in Gagliano del Capo, the hotel Palazzo Daniele sits so far down the Adriatic coast that when Monocle steps out of the car, the phone signal says we’re in Greece. In the sleepy town with arched houses worthy of a De Chirico painting, a church procession passes, the priest carrying a purple-wrapped cross. The door to Palazzo Daniele swings open to reveal a double courtyard of high arches, leading to a raised orangery.

Owned by Gabriele Salini, who bought the palazzo from Francesco Petrucci, whose family built the structure in 1861, Palazzo Daniele is all frescoes overhead and mosaics underfoot. Antiques and

contemporary design are dotted around the otherwise spartan space planned by Palomba Serafini Associati, which kept original details intact for the conversion into a serene 11-room hotel. The duo saw potential in the old architecture for a historical yet contemporary getaway distinct from more anaesthetised luxury travel. “Occasionally someone complains that the bathroom door squeaks,” says Roberto Rizzo, the house manager and one-man welcoming committee at Palazzo Daniele. “Then we know this place is not for them. Today, true luxury is about preserving the patina of time.”

The open kitchen encourages guests to saunter in, say hello and even make requests, homestyle. As Monocle passes, the cook offers a slice of just-baked bread before suggesting a

bowl of her mussels and some sparkling natural wine. “Industry and wealth are still concentrated in the north of Italy,” says Rizzo, popping the cork. “But to live well you have to come to the south.”

Just beyond Palazzo Daniele, a pathway fringed by towering precipices leads to the coast and to Ponte Ciolo, a narrow but dramatic rocky beach in between cliffs giving onto twinkling topaz-coloured water. Part of a network of newly linked hiking trails called the Cammino del Salento, stairs lead to a myrtle-lined path above a beach that follows the entire southeast coast to Otranto, past remnants of ancient dry-rock farm walls on one side, with the Adriatic stretching out on the other.

The nearby town centre and marina of postcard-pretty Tricase has become

1. Poolside at Masseria Moroseta
2. Loungers at Palazzo Daniele
3. Custom tableware
4. Chef Giorgia Eugenia Goggi
5. Fish stand at Taverna del Porto
6. Taverna del Porto serves fresh seafood
7. ... and dishes with flair



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the liveliest area along this part of the coast. Caffè d'Oltremare, a recently opened bar in a small pink castle built in 1890, serves drinks to sunset-hunters on a terrace high above the port. Down the street, Taverna del Porto has become one of Salento's best restaurants, designed like an old-school fishmonger and serving superbly rendered seafood dishes and natural wine. In Tricase's centre, where sulphur-coloured streetlights illuminate timeworn Carparo stone palazzos and baroque churches, cocktail bar Farmacia Balboa was the first to set the tone for the energetic new era here when it opened in 2014 on the main piazza. Down the street, the menu at the intimate Bar Lemí - Cozze e Gin includes dry-aged cod and mackerel burgers and fried anchovies, before it's time to return to Palazzo Daniele for a well-earned rest.

#### Day 3: Valle d'Itria and Ionian coast

Driving back up the length of Salento, towards the stark, white hilltop city of Ostuni, we hit Masseria Moroseta, a small hotel revered by design-minded travellers and one of the pioneers of Salento's contemporary popularity. "What we've done is simply repropose the way things were always done here in the past," says owner Carlo Lanzini, who hails from Brescia in the north of Italy but was beguiled by Salento's traditional farmsteads. There's a Shaker-like purity to Moroseta's furnishings, with wooden spindle chairs and long wooden-plank tables where guests dine together, plus sparing touches such as rough-sided antique marble sinks and timeworn farm doors from flea markets. There's an austerity that could be mistaken for Scandi minimalism but has Puglian simplicity at its roots.

The structure seems to have existed for centuries but was constructed from scratch. It was the first project designed by British architect Andrew Trotter, a friend of Lanzini's from his time living in London. "Builders told us that the project wouldn't work," says Lanzini with a grin. "I was scared. We had the vision but no practical experience yet." The city board didn't approve the outsiders' plans for a full two years but the structure of Moroseta was finally completed in 2016.

In the years since, the food has become as important as the design.

Giorgia Eugenia Goggi, a chef from Milan who came for a stay and never left, serves Pugliese dishes that are heavy on vegetables and local produce. The communal tables serve no more than 20 guests from the hotel and beyond, so the four-night-a-week affair feels more like an easygoing gathering than a formal dining room. "This isn't a restaurant in a traditional sense," she says. "I have more freedom and more room to experiment."

Heading out past the Valle d'Itria's endless *trulli* among the olive groves, we visit the town of Grottaglie 30km away, where Greeks established a ceramic-making colony, whose craft continues to this day. The shop of Nicola Fasano makes clay plates for Moroseta with the splashed enamel dots that have characterised the region's wares for centuries. "Jackson Pollock copied us!" a family member tells me with conviction that seems serious. "We've been contemporary forever."

A short drive west from Grottaglie is the Ionian coast – because the sea is never far away in Salento – the waters of which seem clearer and brighter than the Adriatic. Punta Prosciutto, a beach that's as delightful as its name, is dotted with grassy dunes and parchment-coloured sand. The sunset turns the horizon an incandescent pink, as gaps in the clouds above radiate a rosy crown of the sun in the sky. Before the two-hour drive back to Bari, I remember a local's advice at the beginning of my trip: "To live serenely is to live better." Now how about that house in Salento?



1. Fabrics at Le Constantine
2. Lecce's frothy baroque style
3. Torre Sant'Andrea
4. Anna Maria Enselmi of Palazzo Luce
5. Library at Palazzo Luce
6. Cake at Trattoria Le Zie



#### Getting here:

The nearest airports are Bari and Brindisi, and high-speed rail arrives to Bari and Lecce's central station.

#### Day 1: Lecce and the Adriatic coast:

##### Palazzo Luce

A 14th-century aristocratic palazzo turned design gallery-cum-hotel. *Lecce, palazzolucelecce.com*

##### Bar Cotognata Leccese

Come hungry to enjoy a cheese and béchamel *rustico*. *Lecce, cotognataleccese.com*

##### Caffè Alvino

On the city's main square by a Roman amphitheatre, offering classic local coffee and sweets. *Lecce, +39 08 3224 6748*

##### Trattoria Le Zie

Homestyle cooking in what used to be the living room of the aunts who founded this restaurant. *Lecce, trattorialezie.axeleroweb.it*

##### Bottega del Paralume

Where Nassi Lamps' bases and shades are made to order. *Lecce, bottegadelparalume.com*

##### Ijò Design

An architect turned weaver of pared-down garments. *Lecce, ijodesign.com*

##### Grotta della Poesia

Where the sea has etched away a natural pool among the bluffs. *Roca Vecchia*

##### Torre dell'Orso

A sandy stretch of beach tucked between cliffs. *Melendugno*

##### Faraglioni di Torre Sant'Andrea

Dramatic sea stacks carved into towers by the waves. *Melendugno*

#### Day 2: De Finibus Terrae – The Eastern Adriatic coast

##### Palazzo Daniele

An elegant hotel occupying an old family palazzo. *Gagliano del Capo, palazzodaniele.com*

#### Caffè d'Oltremare

A breathtaking terrace over the Adriatic serving drinks from a castle bar. *Tricase Marina, Lungomare Cristoforo Colombo, 73039*

#### Taverna del Porto

Salento's favourite restaurant for simple seafood dishes. *Tricase Marina, tavernadelporto.com*

#### Farmacia Balboa

The experimental cocktail bar that first brought a breath of modernity to town. *Tricase, farmaciabalboabar.com*

#### Bar Lemí - Cozze e Gin

Seafood bistrot with 70 kinds of gin on offer. *Tricase, Via Tempio, 20, 73039*

#### Tessitura Calabrese

Family-run quality fabric-maker with throw pillows, tablecloths and handbags. *Tiggiano, tessituralabrese.it*

#### Le Constantine

The foundation teaches the art of weaving, with a restaurant operating in summertime. *Uggiano La Chiesa, lecostantine.it*

#### Ponte Ciolo

A tiny port and bathing spot between high precipices and hiking trails. *Gagliano del Capo*

#### Cammino del Salento

A newly linked network of trails following the coast. *Gagliano del Capo to Otranto and beyond*

#### Day 3: De Finibus Terrae – The Eastern Adriatic coast

#### Masseria Moroseta

Custom-built farmhouse hotel and an icon of pared-down contemporary design. *Ostuni, masseriamoroseta.it*

#### Nicola Fasano

Hand-thrown pottery in a town famed for ceramics. *Grottaglie, fasanocnf.it*

#### Punta Prosciutto

A long, sandy beach, perfect for watching the sunset. *Porto Cesareo*