

DISCOVERING
MONOPOLI
in the heart of Puglia



Città di **Monopoli**
Assessorato al Turismo





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Welcome to Monopoli



Let Monopoli embrace you with its vibrant colours, intoxicating scents, and the genuine warmth of its people. Plunge into the turquoise sea hugging the historic centre, wander through rolling olive hills cradling the countryside, and soak up the authentic vibe in every hidden corner. Here, you'll feel right at home, a place where every detail whispers the story of a land and its people. You're not just visitors; you're woven into a living legend that unfolds daily.

Angelo Annese, *Mayor of Monopoli*



Monopoli delights and surprises at every turn: its enchanting sea-kissed old town, the lively spirit of its locals, the mouthwatering aromas of homegrown cuisine, and a coastline that's among the most magical in Puglia. This guide is an invitation to dive deep and uncover ancient tales and let the town's welcoming soul inspire your adventure. Wishing you a pleasant stay and countless discoveries.

Francesco Alba, *Tourism Delegate Councillor*



Monopoli, one of a kind

Monopoli derives its name from the Greek words **monos** and **polis**, meaning unique city. It remains faithful to that name even today, for it truly is a unique town. Indeed, it has preserved its fascinating history and traditions, while adding to this, in modern times, a bustle of activity in the sectors of agriculture, industry, fishing and tourism.

The town has a **population of about 50,000**, and is situated on the Adriatic coast, 43 kilometres south-east of Bari. It is twinned with the towns of Lugoj in Rumania and Lyss in Switzerland. The territory of Monopoli is bordered by the municipalities of Polignano a Mare to the north-west, Castellana-Grotte to the south-west, Alberobello to the south and Fasano to the south-east. It covers an area of 156 square kilometres, from the sea to the hills, reaching a high point of 408 metres, and extending for **15 kilometres along a low, jagged coastline** punctuated by many bays and long sandy beaches. The escutcheon with three white roses on a red ground was given to the town by Federico II who wanted to reward it for remaining loyal to him during the siege of Walter of Brienne in 1207.



A glimpse into history

The town of Monopoli has age-old origins and deeply-rooted **maritime traditions** featuring as it does a commercial and fishing port, ship-building yards and yachting facilities. The first habitable settlement, a village of huts established in the Middle Bronze Age (C15 B.C.), was visited by **Mycenaean seafarers**. It surrounded a well-organized system for landing vessels, which included a deep harbour entrance with parallel jetties. This was silted up by the Normans in 1049.

The **Messapic town** was built on top of this early village. It was surrounded by thick walls into which the Romans inserted a monumental gateway, now forming part of the 15th century castle. The town grew in importance throughout the Middle Ages: indeed, in old nautical charts it is shown as a port of similar status to Bari and Brindisi. It fell into the control of the Lombards and was also under the influence of the Byzantines. In 1044 it was conquered by the Normans and in 1266, like many other neighbouring towns, it passed into **Angevin rule**. From the 16th century onwards the town was the subject of dispute between the Spanish and the Venetians and had to suffer occupation by each in turn.

One of the most glorious episodes in the history of the town concerned the defeat of the Marquis of Vasto, Don Francesco Ferrante D'Avalos, supreme commander of the Spanish army. After sacking Florence and Siena, he led his army of 5000 to mount a futile siege against Monopoli, which lasted for three months. The town was subjected to a heavy bombardment by cannons and the scars can still be seen in a section of wall preserved in Via Cadorna.

On May 28th 1529, the Marquis of Vasto was forced to strike camp. In 1530 the town became the personal possession of Emperor Charles V, who sold it to a merchant from Messina.

The city managed to buy back its freedom by paying a tribute raised by contributions from all its citizens.

Itinerary part 1

MONOPOLI

Start: Piazza Garibaldi
End: Chiesa Santa Maria del Suffragio



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16TH-CENTURY WALLS AND PORTAVECCHIA BEACH

Start from Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi

Stop A • La Rendella Municipal Library

Stop B • Torre Civica

Stop C • Porto Antico

Stop D • Castello Carlo V

Stop E • Bastione Santa Maria

Stop F • Cappella San Vito Martire

Along the way... 16th-Century City Walls

Stop G • Palazzo Palmieri

Stop H • Chiesa di Santa Teresa

Stop I • Chiesa di Santa Maria del Suffragio





Tourist Information Office
at **Sala dei Pescatori**
in **Palazzo Rendella**

Piazza Garibaldi



Starting Point Itinerary 1 • Piazza Garibaldi

Piazza Garibaldi ranks among Monopoli's most historic squares. Once called **Piazza delle Mercanzie** or Platea Publica, it earned its current name after Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Hero of the Two Worlds. Since the 1500s, it has served as the city's main hub as walls expanded toward the Cathedral and the area surrounding this very square. The historic **Palazzo della Dogana** (Customs Office) still stands here.

La Rendella Municipal Library



Stop A • Piazza Garibaldi



CLICK HERE

This palazzo, built in 1558, honours jurist **Prospero Rendella** and now houses the civic library. In the 1500s, the site held a “casa erema”, later known as the “Quartiere” (military headquarters), acting as military barracks for Spanish soldiers.

This spared locals from housing troops in their homes, as was the case previously, causing inconvenience for all those involved.

A **theatre** was opened here in 1841 and ran until declared unsafe in 1910. After restoration, it operated into the 1940s. Since 1956, the building has hosted this vital community library, an essential cultural cornerstone for the local population. The **Sala dei Pescatori**, as can be implied by its dedication, once held the **fish market** from 1940 to 1991, with lively daily auctions as boats returned from their tough daily fishing trips.

www.larendella.it



Torre Civica & Infamous Column



Stop B • Piazza Garibaldi

Built in 1552, the **Civic Tower** faces the Old Harbour and greeted every arriving ship. Its bell in the sail belfry called citizens together or warned of sea dangers.

A clock was added later at the centre of the tower. Below sits Monopoli's coat of arms: three white roses on red, with a **statue of St. Gennaro**. At the base stands the **infamous pillory column** for public shaming of criminals. The fountain dates from the Fascist era, with its stark design.



Porto Vecchio

Gozzi Boats & Palazzo Martinelli



Stop C • Via Porto



CLICK HERE

Pass through the ancient gate into the **Old Harbour**, one of Monopoli's true gems. Known as Portiella del Caricature, it once handled all the town's incoming and outgoing trade.

Above the arch glows a fresco of the Madonna della Madia, the city's patron, portrayed with adoring saints.

Along the old walls, overlooking the Old Harbour, stands **Palazzo Martinelli**, a striking Venetian-style building, rare in Puglia.

Its loggia and windows recall the 1400s Venetian rule. The harbour's calm waters shelter the **Gozzi**, Monopoli's traditional fishing boats in the local seafaring colours: red and blue.

Castello Carlo V and Arms Hall



Stop D • Largo Castello



The building, completed in **1542** under the direction of Viceroy Don Ferrante Loffredo, displays the typical geometry of a sixteenth-century fortress. **The complex is divided into three levels.** From the north-east side you can access the dock floor, corresponding to the hall of arms, which consists of two large rooms with barrel vaulted ceilings, the longer of which was lowered, to make room for a dormitory for Spanish soldiers. Incorporated into the castle in a single hall is the 9th-century church of **San Nicola in Pinna.**

Excavation tests on the floor of the church found piling holes and artefacts attributable to the Bronze Age. The first floor was modified by seventeenth century building works, which replaced the wooden structures with a series of barrel-vaulted halls arranged around a central courtyard when the castle also had a residential function. An access ramp leads to the terrace which had become the drill ground as a replacement for the courtyard floor. From 1826 onwards the castle was used as a jail until the year 1970. Today the structure hosts temporary exhibitions and cultural events.

The Legend of the Lady with the Drum

It is said that the ghost of the “Lady with the Drum”, a mysterious figure of humble origins, still wanders the castle today. The legend remains particularly alive among local fishermen and historic centre residents, who tell of drum sounds coming from the fortress balcony, especially when fishing boats head out to sea. According to tradition, the spectre belonged to a young maiden from the time of the Spanish conquest who married a valiant captain, appointed governor of the city.

As a token of love, the woman built a drum to play during storms, guiding her husband on the right course back to harbour.

Their happiness was then shattered by an evil witch who, through a spell, unleashed a sudden tempest causing the captain's death at sea. The woman also vanished, and since then the drum's sound can still be heard on stormy days, as an echo of lost love.

Bastione Santa Maria



Stop E • Lungomare Santa Maria





Cappella San Vito Martire



Stop F • Via San Vito

The small church dedicated to St. Vito was built by local craftsmen between the 16th and 17th centuries. With a **rectangular plan** in partially plastered tuff masonry, the main facade features a wooden tympanum portal surmounted by an oculus and **sail bell tower**.

16th-Century Walls & Portavecchia Beach



Along the Way...



CLICK HERE

Cala Porta Vecchia is a small beach nestled at the foot of the **city's ancient defensive walls**. Its setting, together with its clean crystal-clear waters, gives this charming cove a truly evocative and picturesque landscape. Thanks to its **rather shallow seabed**, the sea is practically accessible to everyone, allowing enjoyment not only of Monopoli's waters (awarded with Legambiente sails and the **Blue Flag**) but also of a truly characteristic view typical of Puglia's coastal landscape.

Palazzo Palmieri



Stop G • Piazza Palmieri

The mansion was built on a previous home of the family at the bequest of Francesco Paolo. The **grandeur of the main facade** with scenic elegance reflects the goals and prestige of its commissioners. In the lower part the ashlar frames the rest of the building. The portal is set on two Ionic columns on which rests an architrave with a frieze and cornice. Above the entrance there is a coat of arms consisting of a shield on which stand three palm branches and two stars. **The palace stands on four floors.** On the ground floor, there were once stables for horses, halls for carriages and a haystack.

The atrium allows access to the upper levels through a double staircase. On the noble floor, the gallery is the most interesting frescoed room with its picturesque view of the external portico; at one time it was a place where beautiful works of art and archaeological finds were exhibited. A hanging chapel rests on an arch that surmounts a narrow alley. While the top floor once provided guest rooms. In 1921, under the last testament of the Marquis Francesco Saverio, the palace was bequeathed to the Congregation of Charity to house a kindergarten and a School of Arts and Crafts.





Chiesa e Convento di Santa Teresa



Stop H • Via Santa Teresa

The **Church of St. Teresa** was built between 1715 and 1735. Initially consecrated to St. John the Baptist and St. Anne, it was first entrusted to the Discalced Carmelite Fathers, then passed to the Cloistered Episcopal Nuns of the Holy House. It was not the only change of hands, as before the nuns known as the Servants of Mary, the Vincentians had cared for the religious building.


The **Convent of St. Teresa** was built in 1585, when some faithful purchased various houses in the old town and transformed them into a religious institution called “Conservatorio della Casa Santa” (Conservatory of the Holy House). Later, under the bishopric of Antonio Porzio in the 17th century, the current building was constructed as a cloistered convent to safeguard the wellbeing and honour of poor orphan girls (devoted to the Blessed Virgin of the Presentation), daughters abandoned by their mothers, and all those girls who expressed the will to become nuns. In addition, until the mid-1900s, it was used as a nursery school.

Chiesa Santa Maria del Suffragio

known as the Purgatory Church



CLICK HERE

 **Stop 1** • Via Padre Nicodemo Argento

The façade bears repeated reference to the **theme of death**. The jambs and architrave of the entrance portal are populated by skulls and crossed bones that look like sinister glimpses from the beyond. On the carved scrolls are phrases engraved in Latin that you can almost imagine them being uttered by the sculpted dead as 'Hodie mihi cras tibi' (**today upon me, tomorrow upon you**). The wooden entry doors feature two carved skeletons surrounded by decorative panels that symbolize the social classes, the highest ranks are the aristocratic and ecclesiastical insignia and below the tools of the working classes. A window to the left of the access portal allows you to see some of the so-called standing dead namely the **mummified remains of members of the confraternity** of Purgatory, dressed in black mozzetta trimmed with red piping and an embroidered red flame. Traditionally the neighbourhood elders greet them, almost in prayer: 'Good evening to all of you. You have been like us; we will be like you. Good evening to all of you.'





Commemorative Bas-Relief of the Heleanna Shipwreck

On 28 August 1971, Monopoli sailors rescued refugees from the Greek ferry that caught fire off Savelletri. For this heroic feat, the city was awarded the Silver Medal for Civil Valour. The bas-relief is located on the façade of Charles V Castle.

Monument to the Fallen
of the First World War
Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II,
page 22.



Itinerary part 2

MONOPOLI

Start: Via Padre Nicodemo Argento
End: Via Amalfitana



Scan the QR code
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Start from Via Padre Nicodemo Argentò



- Stop A** • Basilica Cattedrale Maria SS. della Madia
- Stop B** • Cripta rupestre Madonna del Soccorso
- Stop C** • Chiesa di San Domenico
- Stop D** • Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi
- Stop E** • Centro murattiano, Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II
- Stop F** • Via Giuseppe Garibaldi
- Stop G** • Arcate del Vico Gesuiti
- Stop H** • Chiesa di S. Maria Amalfitani
- Stop I** • Chiesetta di San Giuseppe



Basilica Cattedrale Maria SS. della Madia



Start Itinerary 2 from Via Padre Nicodemo Argento
Stop A • Basilica Cattedrale Maria SS. della Madia



CLICK HERE

The main facade is divided into two orders and is rendered three dimensional by the curved profile and by two lateral volutes, surmounted by flaming torches in soft stone. The church square overlooks the bulk of the **episcopal palace** that dialogues with the baroque geometries of the Cathedral, located opposite. An external wall completed in 1786 houses a series of busts depicting the saints, works by Ludovico Fiorentino which were originally features of the central chapel of the church before its reconstruction in the baroque style in 1742. **Three naves** inside the basilica are marked by two rows of composite pillars in a geometric setting to provide a central position for the sacred Byzantine Icon of Our Lady with Child (Madonna della Madia), displayed for the adoration of the faithful in the chapel behind the presbytery at a height of 6 metres.

Along the right nave the series of side chapels begins with the '**Armadio delle travi**' namely the chapel of beams, which preserves the 31 beams that made up the raft that, on the night of the 16th of December 1117, arrived at the port carrying the icon. On the right-hand side of the transept, you can find the most monumental of all the chapels, commissioned by the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament in 1755; it displays the pictorial spectacle of a **trptych by Francesco De Mura**. An oil on canvas represents the Last Supper in agreement with canonical representation. Two smaller canvases continue the theme of sacrifice, the one on the right portrays the sacrifice of Isaac while the one on the left The Supper of Emmaus. In eager anticipation, you take the flight of stairs that lead to the chapel which honours the image of the Madonna della Madia, a work that personifies the religious and anthropological identity of the city. The icon sits above an ornate altar in polychrome marble: the Spanish brocatelle alternates with the alabaster, the yellow dialogues with the green. On the sides of the altar emerge from the white marble the statuary bodies of St. Joseph with child and St. Michael Archangel, of the school of the famous Giuseppe Sammartino. We leave the basilica admiring the soaring **bell tower**, built between 1688 and 1693, to replace the previous one. Inspired by Lecce Baroque, the five levels that rise towards the top become progressively smaller. Marking the corners are half pilasters culminating in capitals in the Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian style.

The Byzantine icon that came from the sea in 1117



From the icon flows the magnetic force of the Virgins gaze, her crown of hair sacrificed under a headdress and wearing a maphorion to cover her shoulders and head. Her eyes are directed to the observer to underline the gesture of the hand with sweet firmness, indicating that in that child is the only way of salvation for man. The child bears signs of divine royalty in his golden robes, decorated with sunrays and in his mature face immersed in superhuman meditations. He holds a scroll in his hand, a symbol of the Gospel. His feet crossed as if to prefigure martyrdom on the cross. Below, two figures represent a deacon holding a votive candle and an adoring monk.



Cripta Rupestre Madonna del Soccorso



Stop B • Via San Domenico, 73



Your attention is immediately drawn to the three statues on the entrance door to the hypogeum, preciously carved by the famous Renaissance artist **Stefano da Putignano**, they depict a boy between two figures in prayer.

Without doubt, they came from the church of Santa Maria della Nova and thus spared from the Spanish army cannons. Access to the crypt is by a steep staircase that descends six meters below street level. Originally an ancient harbour

channel the square vault presents two naves divided by columns and terminating in two apses. Noteworthy is the fresco of the enthroned Madonna with child which dates to the fifteenth century.

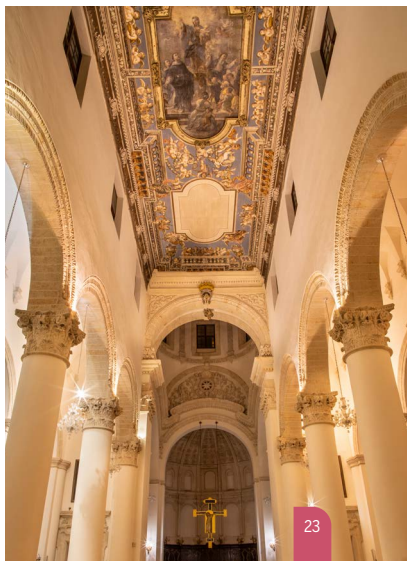
Chiesa di San Domenico



Stop C • Via San Domenico

Between the 16th and 17th centuries, buildings destroyed by artillery fire in April 1528 at the behest of Andrea Gritti the then commander of the Venetian garrison, were rebuilt behind the city walls to prevent them falling into the hands of the Spanish. As a result, the 14th-century Dominican church of Santa Maria Della Nova was razed to the ground. The subsequent reconstruction of the present-day church of St. Dominic features a majestic facade with several elegant and refined frames, carvings and precious sculpted images. The intricate work of the rose window stands out like a Romanesque echo. In the tympanum stands a sculptural group of the enthroned **Madonna with child**, a feature from the previous building and one credited to **Stefano da Putignano**.

The eye is naturally guided along the vertical axis to complete the Christological theme with the sculptural groups of the Passion and the Resurrection. Above the rose-window stands the figure of St. Dominic giving his blessing, while on the sides of the facade are placed statues of the theological virtues of Fortitude and Temperance. The interior clearly shows the influence of Lecce baroque from the late sixteenth century in the setting and the decoration. The side chapels were added at the request of local aristocratic families between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Whereas, the magnificent painting, which portrays **Saint Peter the martyr by Giovanni Bellini**, commissioned for the original church of Santa Maria Della Nova. Now hangs in the Provincial Art Gallery in Bari. Another important work that was once a feature of the original church now hangs in the diocesan museum and is the **Miracle of Soriano by Jacopo Palma the Younger** it also highlights the influence of Venice and the Venetians on the Levantine town. Notable features of the chapel of the Rosary by Mauro Manieri are; Our Lady of the Rosary between Saint Dominic and Saint Catherine by Cenatiempo and a pleasant eighteenth century note introduced by the altars in **Neapolitan polychrome marble**.





Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi



Stop D • Largo Plebiscito, 15

The Franciscan building dates back to 1749 and is the work of **Michele Colangiuli of Acquaviva**. The beautiful facade is embellished with half pilasters and decorated from the portal to the upper fastigium. On the inside, in the candour of the decoration in stucco by Carlo Cassino are the alternating side chapels. A **wooden crucifix** on the presbytery immediately stands out due to its expressive power; sources say that the trunk of the figure emerged from the ruins of a building. Over the altar, a painting celebrates The Glory of the Order. The first chapel on the right houses an altarpiece attributed to the school of Bassano, featuring St. John the Baptist and saints Gregory and Leonardo, and the statuesque body of the **Virgin with Child**, affiliated to the school of the sculptor **Stefano da Putignano**.

Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II



Stop E • Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II

After the maze of narrow streets of the old town, the spaciousness of the square introduces the new face taken on by the city at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, under the pressure of an increasingly enterprising and industrious bourgeoisie. Positioned to the west, behind the line of the old city wall it serves as a watershed between the old town and the borgo murattiano (The district takes its name from Joachim Murat, who began its construction, during his rule at the head of the Kingdom of Naples) It is almost a perfect square of an area of **22,000 square meters**. Around its perimeter is a double row of Hollyoaks planted in 1893 The 'borgo' or piazza is formed of two rectangles crossed by a fifteen-metre-wide avenue. Initially, at the end of the eighteenth century, engineers Sorino and De Simone proposed the idea of a portico; however, the cost of the project proved too expensive and therefore, was rejected. On the left as you leave Largo Plebiscito, is a **War Memorial** which commemorates the towns, 300 victims of World War I., It dates back to 1928 and is the work of Simone di Brindisi. A stop in the Borgo Murattiano allows you to walk around a grid of straight streets while admiring the portals, coats of arms and balconies.

Via Giuseppe Garibaldi



Stop F • Via Giuseppe Garibaldi

The **Merchants' Street**, today known as **Via Garibaldi**, is one of the most evocative and history-rich thoroughfares of Monopoli's old town. Winding through the heart of the historic centre, this street bears witness to centuries of trade, culture, and daily life.



Arcate del Vico dei Gesuiti



Stop G • Vico Gesuiti

Vico dei Gesuiti, in the heart of Monopoli's historic centre, is one of the city's most enchanting and photographed streets, characterised by a **sequence of arches**. The Jesuits built a college in Monopoli in 1613. Today, at the end of the alley, you can still admire what remains of the portal.



Chiesa di S. Maria Amalfitana with crypt and **Chiesetta di San Giuseppe**



Stop H • Largo Amalfitana

Stop I • Via Amalfitana

The only religious building in the urban fabric bearing significant Romanesque architectural and sculptural traces. After its conversion to the Baroque style in 1772, the church underwent restoration of its original Romanesque features in the 1930s, initiated by Carlo Ceschi, then Superintendent of Puglia's Monuments.

The **crypt** is preceded by a **burial ground** and consists of two apses, while the two central pillars were added later. Tradition holds that this underground chamber was created by Amalfitan merchants devoted to the Virgin Mary following a shipwreck they miraculously survived. Adjacent to the Church of Santa Maria degli Amalfitani stood the **Church of San Giuseppe**, of which only fragments, such as the façade, remain today.

The church was built by carpenters in 1612. Here operated the namesake Confraternity, which in the early 1900s chose the nearby Church of San Leonardo as its more suitable seat.

Itinerary **MUSEI**

Start: Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II
End: Via San Leonardo



Scan the QR code
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Start: Rifugi Antiaerei, P.zza Vittorio Emanuele II

Stop A • Il Bastione del Molino

Stop B • Museo di Romualdo

Stop C • Museo Diocesano

Stop D • Museo di San Leonardo





CLICK HERE

Rifugi Antiaerei



Start Museums Itinerary • Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II

Monopoli becomes the target if **air-raids** by British fighter-bombers in the early months of the WWII, which sees Italy allied with the Germans, since the city presented on its territory big tanks of the Italian American Oil Society (SIAP) and the Military Command of the IV Fuel Depot with the annexed military area of the Cervina.

At the beginning, the city has a small underground air-raid shelter on the mount side of the War Memorial, near a large cistern for public use. After the two bombings, emerges the urgent need to provide the city with and adequate anti-aircraft protection (PAA).

Two existing cisterns are connected; four aeration wells are built, two of which are also operated as emergency exists with iron ladders inserted in the rock, a latrine with its well of absorption, a hammer deviation and several tunnels for connecting the arms to the aeration wells. The shelters, which can accommodate about **4,200 people**, are inaugurated with the blessing of Bishop Gustavo Bianchi after September 8, 1943.

Bastione del Molino

Museo dell'artiglieria all'aperto
e Antico fossato



CLICK HERE



Stop A • Via Mulini

Visit the open-air artillery museum by walking along the **16th-century city walls**, where historic cannons have been repositioned. The route links Lungomare Santa Maria to Via Cadorna. The ancient moat along Via Cadorna forms part of the museum path.





Museo di Romualdo



Stop B • Via Padre Nicodemo Argento • *Paid entry*

This very special museum was built following the renovation of some of the **rooms under the majestic Cathedral Basilica** of Monopoli, with the creation of an exhibition that runs through the entire eighteenth-century building at the transept, from via Argento to via Mulini.

The archaeological researches carried out during the works have allowed to collect documentation on the historical evolution of the city and on the many forms of occupation that have followed each other over the centuries. Going back the time we find the **remains of the crypt of the Romanesque Cathedral** built by Bishop Romuald in the twelfth century, on the ruins of a previous church of which the tomb was highlighted, with graves carved into the rock.

Nonetheless, the place on which the Baroque building stands today had been frequented for centuries. A **tomb of a child** dating back to the early **3rd century BC** was found next to a pit for votive offerings used in the same period. Impressive are the half-chamber tombs, dating back to the fifth century BC.

The oldest phase is however constituted of the **postholes**, referable to the huts used by the first inhabitants of the site settled in the **Middle Bronze Age** (XV sec. BC), when the peninsula between Cala del Porto and Cala Porta Vecchia was occupied by a village of huts already frequented by the Mycenaeans.

Museo Diocesano



Stop C • Via Cattedrale, 26 • Paid entry



CLICK HERE

The museum, adjacent to the Cathedral, keeps next to an important collection of canvases and icons, extremely significant pieces such as the precious **Byzantine Staurotheke** (reliquary of the crucifix) in gilded silver and enamels, an old nautical chart, miniatures, manuscripts, sacred vestments, liturgical objects in silver.

Established on 29 June 2002, in the of the former Episcopal seminary founded by Bishop Giuseppe Cavalieri in 1668, the diocesan museum, opens to the public with a path expanded by the visit of the Laboratory for analysis and restoration of paintings.

The works exposed, coming from different Churches of the Diocese of Monopoli, invite to a great journey to the rediscovery of Christian culture over the centuries. The silver Staurotheke and cloisonné enamels, the wooden polyptych signed by Campsa and Di Malines, the icons, St. Jerome del Bastiani of **the paintings of the painters Veronese, Palma il Giovane, Vecellio, Finoglio, Fracanzano, Miglionico, Lama**, a rare charta navigationis, the **miniatures of Reginaldo da Pirano**, the liturgical parchment codes are just some of the pieces that make up the composite mosaic of wonders kept in this museum and are offered to the public.





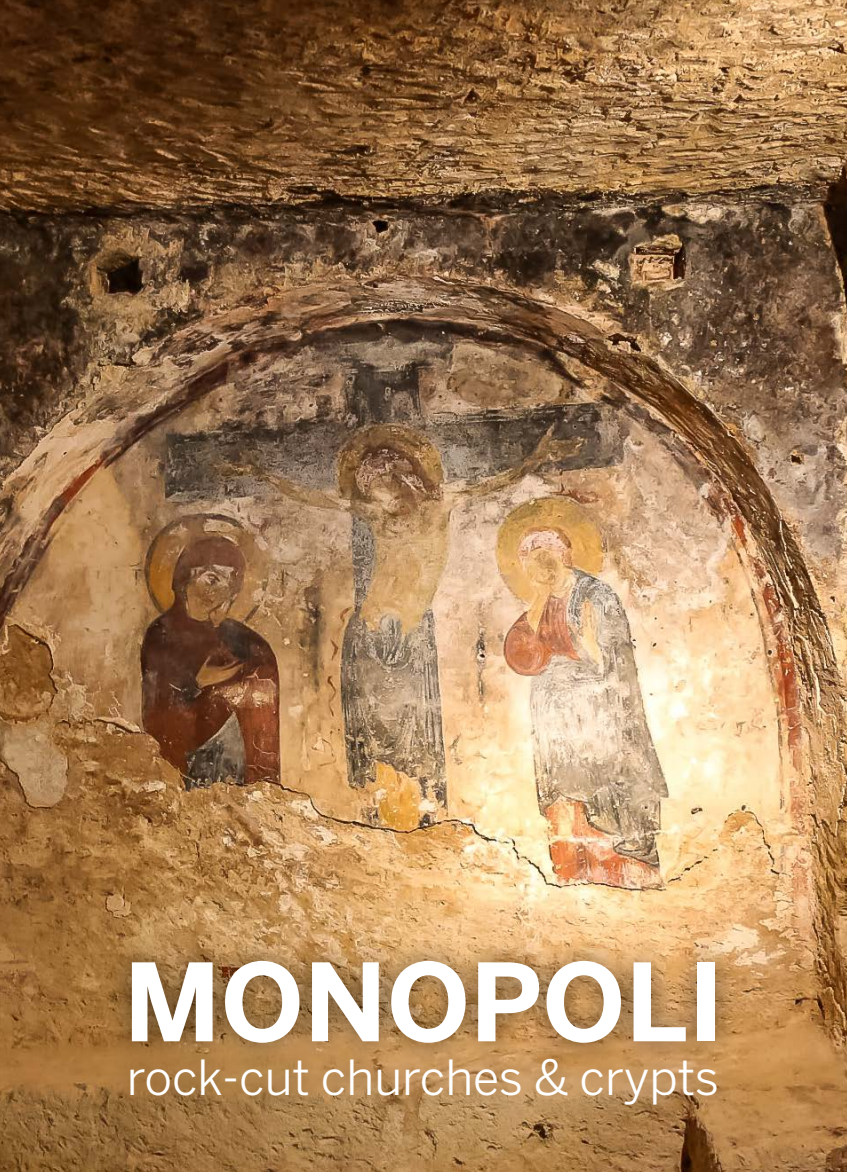
Museo di San Leonardo

 **Stop D** • Via San Leonardo, 3

The museum of St. Leonard, built in 2000, is located along the **matroneum of the Benedictine cloisters**, who lived in this sacred place. The peculiarity of the artefacts of art admirable in this cultural container consists in being usable in the spaces in which they were used by the religious who commissioned them; they are, therefore, the faithful mirror of a cultural-religious climate as much local as national and international.

This group of sacred art objects is flanked by another, that of the pious association of St. Joseph, active fraternity in St. Leonard.

The visitor makes a journey into **sacred art from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century**, during which he admires a “**forty hours machine**” and silver, crucifixes, reliquaries, coffins, missals and more. The suggestion aroused by these artistic testimonies is amplified by the frame of the matroneum, played by the alternation of areas of shadow and light, from which enjoying a privileged view of the entire church, in the past exclusive of the black Benedictines, who enjoyed it hidden from the eyes of those who were standing by, from the grates, which even now are in situ.



MONOPOLI

rock-cut churches & crypts



[CLICK HERE](#)

The vast olive groves etched by picturesque furrows in the rock, known as 'lame', are the fruit of the thousand-year passage of water from the hills to the sea. Man has rendered this natural drainage of rainwater even more efficient through the construction of artificial channels, known locally as 'menatore', which flow into the branches of the 'lame'.

Also, since the Early Middle Ages, the inhabitants of the territory have exploited the soft local rock allowing them to create a series of purpose-built environments such as Stables, oil mills, flour mills, houses, crypts and churches. The latter embellished by beautiful frescoes in shapes and colours of Byzantine influence. Several rupestrian churches can be found in both the urban setting as well as in the rural area surrounding the town.

The original medieval town was surrounded by two 'lame', now primarily buried, which on one side constituted a natural defence, on the other a reserve of water. The one situated on the western side of the town is **Lama Belvedere**, annotated on the municipal maps as Torrente Ferraricchio. The current name derives from the seventeenth century, Masseria Belvedere.

The 'lama' forms a link between the port and the countryside and is where numerous caves testify to a human presence over the centuries. Following the 'lama', you come across a series of man-made water tanks and access compartments dug out of the rock interconnected with numerous naturally occurring cavities. The other channel, which runs along the town on the eastern side reaching Cala Porta Vecchia, is **Lama Don Angelo**, which is home to a genuine rupestrian masterpiece: the **crypt of the Holy Spirit**. The monument located just beyond the cemetery in the district of Sant'Andrea, dates back to the 11th century and imitates the architecture of a Romanesque church with columns and elaborate Capitals. In fact, inside three naves are divided by three pairs of pillars and columns, on which are set arches that create the visual effect of real cross vaults. This gives a convincing impression of a basilicalike environment. Two apses and remains of frescoes accentuate the charm of the church. Each 'lama' bears the traces of a rupestrian settlement and churches carved out of the rock.





The **rupestrian village of the Saints Andrea e Procopio**, in the district of Contrada L'Assunta near Masseria Rosati, is an excellent example of one such medieval rural community and boasts a crypt rich in noteworthy traces of frescoes from the 13th century.

A Saint George on horseback, paladin of the crusaders, the Saints Cosmas, Damian and St. Eligius patron St. of metalworkers, are tangible signs of the cult of saints close to the activities and feelings of the small rural group, engaged in the cultivation of the olive groves, arable land and raising livestock. Also, in the myriad of crypts and villages in the area around Monopoli, the **Rupestrian Sanctuary of St. Cecilia** is undoubtedly worth a visit, located inside the Botanical Garden Lama Degli Ulivi, in the district of Contrada Conchia, or you could admire the remains of frescoes depicting the crucifixion of an Archangel in the **crypt of Cristo Campanarello** in Masseria Zaccaria in the district of Contrada Lamantia.



MONOPOLI

festivals & popular traditions



March 19

San Giuseppe

The Bonfire Feast

Bonfires in Courtyards & Ancient Treats

On 19 March, the city honours the Carpenter Saint by lighting towering wood pyres, symbolising winter's end and spring's arrival — a pagan rite burning away the old to welcome the new.

This timeless tradition has evolved into a beloved popular feast.

Old-town families gather around small fires in squares, backstreets, and lanes, sharing songs, dances, and the irresistible scent of roasted chickpeas over glowing coals.

Easter

Holy Week Rites

The week before Easter unfolds with sacred traditions, starting from Palm Sunday with every church commemorating Christ's entry into Jerusalem. On Maundy Thursday, after the Last Supper Mass, the faithful visit the "sepolcri"— altar of repose displays in parishes. The week's emotional peak is the Procession of the Mysteries and Sorrowful Virgin. Passion statues and the Madonna process through streets to the sound of funeral marches and "troccole" (ancient wooden-iron rattles) held by the seven confraternities. On Easter Vigil night, the revived "egg song" tradition sees groups of youngsters with guitars, tambourines, and accordions serenading homes in the rural hamlets, waking families and hoping for gifted eggs.





May

San Francesco da Paola Feast

After the convent fraternity's triduum, celebrations peak with Saturday evening Mass. The town's banner leads the procession, as a lay symbol, flanked by marine officers, who over the years have become particularly devoted to the saint. Through crowds and along the nave, the patron statue advances, followed by the praying faithful. It heads towards the Cathedral, but first stopping in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele where, in memory of the historic bond between the Paolotti and the University, the tricolour-sashed Mayor offers the town keys to the Saint, which are then pinned to the statue's wrists as symbols of communal protection.

June

Feast of the Holy Physicians Cosma e Damiano e San Cataldo

Honouring the Holy Doctors and San Cataldo over three days during the first weekend of June, Saturday begins with San Cataldo's wooden statue on a lavish "altarino" (small altar).

Right after, a procession starts with statues of the two Medici Saints in Spanish-style doctoral robes and San Cataldo, all shouldered by the faithful through the streets.

The icons reach the Cathedral, resuming on Sunday evening for a grand procession through the old town's cultural heart, ending at San Domenico.

Faithful carry lit votive candles, their size once matching the favour sought. In previous times, devotees also offered precious ex-votos (rings, earrings, bracelets) hung on saints' robes or wrists, signifying sacrifice for earthly health.





August and December **Patronal Feast** **of the Madonna della Madia**



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The Story of the Landing

The origin of the great devotion to the Madonna della Madia lies in the story of a painted icon arriving by sea, pushed by waves onto a raft. During Norman rule, when Bishop Romualdo led Monopoli's faithful, in the night between 15-16 December 1117, a devotee named Mercurio saw an angel appear in his dream three times.

The angel urged him to go to the bishop with a message: the entire populace must head to the port in procession. Only on his third attempt did Mercurio overcome the bishop's understandable scepticism. When the procession reached the mysterious vessel touching the shore, everyone was astonished.

The icon and beams were carried in procession to the Cathedral. Those beams were used to build the Romanesque temple's rafter roof, then nearing completion.

The Feast Day: a dual appointment of faith and tradition

on 16 December, day of the religious festival of the Madonna della Madia, Monopoli wakes before dawn for one of the year's most anticipated and heartfelt events. At 5am, thousands gather at the port to witness the re-enactment of the miraculous landing of the Madonna's icon, brought from the sea on a raft.

It's an emotional moment, preceded by the traditional "nottata", with families gathering at home to stay up together festively until, as people say, "the Madonna descends" to the port.

The celebrations repeat in August, a month particularly dear to Monopolitan Marian devotion. On the evening of 31 July, crowds of faithful gather before the Basilica Cathedral for the recitation of the Holy Rosary. At the stroke of midnight, the opening of the main door officially begins the month dedicated to the Holy Patroness.

The days of 13, 14, 15, and 16 August are dedicated to solemn celebrations, drawing many Monopolitans from abroad who return for the occasion. City streets come alive with artistic illuminations, fireworks displays, musical bands, and attractions for children. In the late evening of 14 August, the icon's landing is re-enacted with the same winter ceremony, renewing the bond between the town and its Protectress.





September 1st **Bath at Dawn**

Music welcomes the first rays of sun and kicks off Monopoli's traditional dawn bath. By tradition, at dawn on 1 September, hundreds gather to perform this centuries-old rite of mind and body purification, a good omen for facing autumn and winter.

In Puglia and especially Monopoli, this custom is deeply felt. In recent years, the Municipal Administration has added a new dimension to it, turning it into a major musical and popular event attracting thousands of participants.

Alba di Note is an event uniting tradition and innovation, sea and music, community and enchantment—a moment to bid farewell to summer together and embrace the new day immersed in Monopoli's beauty.

December 13

The Feast of Santa Lucia

On the afternoon of the 12th of December, which is the eve of the feast of Santa Lucia, the traditional fair is held in the streets of the town centre (via Cavour) and lasts the whole night and the following day. All the illuminations placed in front of the church of Santa Lucia together with the Christmas lights of the balconies seem to be in religious harmony with the meaning of the light that the Martyr represents.

At the fair there are a lot of stalls, typically selling Christmas decorations and figurines for nativity scenes made from papier-mâché, chalk or clay by local craftsmen.

In the past, it was also the lovers' fair and children's fair with many toys and children were willing to wake up early and go to the first mass at five o'clock in the morning in order to obtain the toy they wanted, while young lovers bought "u coccheridde" (a little coloured terracotta bowl) to give to their fiancées and future mother-in-laws. Despite the consumer aspect of today's fair, the feast has kept its original dimension with religious moments like the procession on the 13th of December thanks to the congregation of Santa Lucia.





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MONOPOLI

and its hamlets

Monopoli's Contrade, the town's rural hamlets between the hills and the sea



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Monopoli's rural territory fans out from the town to cover **91 districts** and an area of 15,632 hectares. It is divided between the 'marittima' the coastal Murge and the Murge Barese. As such, the majority of the Monopolitan territory can be considered countryside. A large part of the population resides in the countryside, characterized by the scattered settlements of lively communities, many engaged in farming activities and a beautiful associative life favoured by the parishes. Every year in nearly all the districts there is a religious festival or sagra, which flank the towns patronal feast. **The vast plain of magnificent secular olive trees** which covers the territory of Monopoli is one of the most significant monuments in the area and makes up part of the Parco agrario Degli Ulivi that, runs along the coast for 40 km, at a width of between 5 and 7 km up to the town of San Vito dei Normanni (in the province of Brindisi).

The ancient presence of the sacred plant in Athens and its cultivation are testified by the discovery of pottery fragments of containers used to transport and conserve oil during the period of the first Greek migrations. In 1992, as part of excavations in Piazza Palmieri in Monopoli the Archaeological Superintendence found some charred kernels of *olea europea*, datable to 1300-1150 B.C. The monumental plants belong to the Cima di Mola variety and are characterized by the surprising plasticity of their trunks with bulging irregularities caused by ancient rootstock, the wild oleaster. You seem like you are passing through an open-air museum of wood carvings of incredible charm, as if strange, giant and creatures were mysteriously imprisoned in wood.



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The sea and coast

15 kilometres of crystal-clear waters



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For most, it's undoubtedly the **most beautiful stretch of coast in Bari province**. One of those discoveries that stays with you forever. The coastal strip, nearly 15 km long, offers unforgettable seaside experiences to tourists and residents alike, with its wide variety of beaches, all sharing pristine, irresistible waters and distinctive rocky cliffs.

Not surprisingly, it has repeatedly earned the prestigious "**Blue Flag**" recognition and Legambiente's award. The northern stretch, along with the more central city area, features low jagged cliffs alternating with small and medium coves. Southward, and in some stretches of the popular "Capitolo" area, you'll enjoy **long beaches** of fine golden sand.

You'll also see fascinating coastal dunes in certain beach areas. Explore this welcoming coast on foot, by boat or surfing, enjoying its stunning waters. A natural setting of harmonious cliffs, gorges or escarpments that, together with the many coves, provide perfect anchorage spots. Among the thrills the local sea offers: views of sea cliffs, caves formed by seawater erosion. And for the more adventurous, why not venture to the "sciale", those invigorating cold currents close to shore. Plenty of sports to enjoy in the water or along the beaches. Several equipped beaches offer refreshment points, cabins, parasols and sunbeds, pedal boat hire, sports areas, and nightclubs.



MONOPOLI

traditions, flavours and colours

Monopoli dish by dish from fresh fish to countryside flavours



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The landscape with the colors of history and nature finds its ideal mirror in the typical dishes. The delicacies of the sea land in the port of a very rich table. How can you resist a fish soup (**Cjambòtte**) or a fried fish in which even crabs peep out?

A baking pan of rice, potatoes and mussels, the first cousin of Valencian paella, reminds Monopolitans of the Bourbon domination. The octopus, grilled or cooked in a terracotta pot (**pignata**) and even raw, has been a staple of the Adriatic diet for millennia. The countryside pours its meadows into the dish as in the typical '**ngrepiete**: its name could derive from the Greek adjective kraipnos with the meaning of quick, swirling as the wooden spoon swirls inside the terracotta pot to mix purée of fava beans and country vegetables. There are mainly four traditional herbs, namely the common aspraggine called Pisscelucerte, the wild fennel (Finucchjidde), the dandelion (Dente di leone) and the rural chicory (**Cecuredde**).

Our local panzerotto is similar to the Neapolitan fried pizza, born from the leftover dough of bread fried in olive oil in the form of half-moons stuffed with pieces of tomato and cheese. A variety of watermelon called **Cjanciuffe** is a key summer ingredient in the **Cjallèdde**, a refreshing wet bread soup also seasoned with sliced tomatoes, olive oil, salt, pepper and oregano. Next to this excellent course we find **zucchina alla poverella**, fried slices of zucchini with vinegar and mint. Since the fifteenth century the tradition gives us the recipe of **taralli**. These are baked goods probably born in times of famine made with a mixture of flour, olive oil, salt and white wine, usually offered to guests. Among the typical sweets: the **bocconotto** (a shortcrust pastry filled with almond paste and sour cherries), the **cartellate** (a lace-shaped pastry, curled in round shapes, then fried and dipped in vincotto or honey), and the Easter **scarcella** (pastry dough in various shapes with an egg placed in the centre).





Votive shrines in the historic center 



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chiesetta
San Giovanni

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