

What to do in Monopoli Discover its white streets, port and beaches



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By Floriane

Monopoli is one of the towns we enjoyed most during [our stay in Puglia](#). Less spectacular at first glance than **Polignano a Mare**, it struck us as gentler, more pleasant to live in and, above all, more practical for spending a few nights on the coast.

Its historic center is easy to visit on foot, with its white alleyways, lively little squares, Baroque cathedral, old port and waterfront. But in our opinion, Monopoli is more than just a stroll through the old town. Its real appeal lies in the fact that you can enjoy the beaches to the south, go out in the evening without having to take the car, and easily reach Polignano a Mare, Alberobello or the other villages in the Itria Valley.

On the other hand, there's no need to do everything. Some places are worth visiting more for the atmosphere outside, the views or the walk, than for an in-depth visit. In this article, we share with you **our itinerary for visiting Monopoli**, our favorite beaches, our parking tips, our addresses, but also what we find less indispensable

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on site.

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How long does it take to visit Monopoli?

In our opinion, you should allow at least half a day to visit Monopoli. The historic center is fairly compact and can easily be explored on foot in 2-3 hours, taking in the cathedral, Cala Porta Vecchia, Charles V's castle, the old port and the narrow white streets of the old town.

However, if you really want to enjoy Monopoli without running around, we recommend a full day. You'll be able to visit the city center in the morning, have lunch there and then head off to the beaches south of town in the afternoon. In our opinion, this is the best compromise if you're on a road trip in Puglia.

For our part, we stayed 2 nights in Monopoli and found it a very pleasant choice. The town is lively in the evenings, gentler than some of Puglia's most touristy destinations, and well-situated for trips to Polignano a Mare, Alberobello or the coastal beaches. On the other hand, if your itinerary is very tight, it's not essential to stay here for several days: one day is enough to get a good idea.

A half-day tour of Monopoli

Half a day is enough if you simply want to explore Monopoli's historic center. In this case, concentrate on the white streets, the cathedral, Cala Porta Vecchia, the ramparts, Charles V's castle and the Porto Antico. This is a good option if you're staying in Polignano a Mare, Bari or the Itria Valley.

On the other hand, this time is a little short if you want to enjoy the beaches or take your time in the city. Monopoli can be visited quickly, but it's best enjoyed unhurriedly.

A day trip to Monopoli

In our opinion, a full day is the ideal length of time for a first discovery. You can visit the old town in the morning, have lunch in the center, then head for the beaches south of Monopoli in the afternoon. At the end of the day, return to the historic center to enjoy the evening atmosphere around the old port and Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi.

This is the format we would recommend to most travelers discovering Puglia for the first time.

1 or 2 nights in Monopoli

Sleeping in Monopoli is a very good idea if you're looking for a pleasant base on the coast. The town is lively enough to go out in the evening, but is still easier to live in than Polignano a Mare, which is often busier and more expensive in high season.

With 1 or 2 nights on site, you can alternate between visits, beaches and excursions around Monopoli. It's also a good option if you're traveling with your family, or if you prefer to limit changes of accommodation during your stay in Puglia.

What to do in Monopoli, Puglia

Monopoli is not a city where you have to visit one thing after another. Its appeal lies mainly in its atmosphere: the white streets of the historic center, the little squares, the flower-filled facades, the old port, the views of the sea and the beaches, all accessible on foot or in a few minutes by car.

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In our opinion, it's best to visit Monopoli at a leisurely pace, without too heavy a schedule. The historic center is quite small, but it's worth taking the time to get lost, retrace your steps and come back at the end of the day, when the light becomes softer and the terraces start to fill up.

Our itinerary for visiting the historic center of Monopoli

We stayed **two nights in Monopoli** to take a breather and enjoy the city to the full. We'd rather take our time and enjoy the atmosphere.

We explore **the old town on arrival mid-afternoon**, returning the next morning after a good night's sleep. Then it's on to **the coast** to discover the **beaches south of Monopoli**, ideal for a lazy day.

Let's set off for a stroll: into the historic center and lose ourselves in **Monopoli's narrow, colorful streets**, between flower-filled balconies and local life.

Allow around **2 hours to walk through the old town**, along the waterfront and around the picturesque port. If you like photography, allow a little more + 2 hours if you'd like to [take a cruise](#).

1. Start with the **Maria Santissima della Madia Cathedral**. The façade is sober, but the **Baroque marble interior** is superb. In summer, come early or late to avoid the crowds.
2. Then head down to **Cala Porta Vecchia**, the town's integrated beach. It's **very popular in summer**: sunrise or late afternoon are perfect for a leisurely swim.
3. Then follow the **waterfront** to **Charles V's castle**. Temporary exhibitions are held here on a regular basis: if it's open, take a look, as the grounds offer some lovely views.
4. Finish off at **Porto Antico**, a charming little port with **blue and white boats**. The atmosphere of the fishermen in the early morning is well worth the detour.
5. Take a break in **Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi**: cafés, restaurants and pretty terraces. Ideal for a spritz or gelato before the suite.

1. Getting lost in Monopoli's historic center

Monopoli's historic center is probably the most beautiful part of the city. Here you'll find everything you love about Puglia: narrow streets, white houses, colorful shutters, flower-filled balconies, little churches and squares where you can stop for a drink or an ice cream.

We advise you not to try too hard to follow a precise itinerary at first. The old town is best discovered on foot, as you wander from one alley to the next. This is also how you come across the most beautiful details: a decorated façade, an archway, a small courtyard, a view of the sea between two buildings.

The center isn't very big, so you don't really risk getting lost. In just 1 or 2 hours, you can get a good idea of what's on offer. But if you're staying overnight, try to come back in the evening: the atmosphere is livelier, more local, and in our opinion much more pleasant than during the day.

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2. Discover the Maria Santissima della Madia cathedral

Maria Santissima della Madia Cathedral is one of Monopoli's most important monuments. It lies in the heart of the historic center and is well worth a stop on your stroll.

Even if you're not particularly fond of churches, we recommend you take a few minutes to enter. The richly decorated interior contrasts with the simplicity of the surrounding white streets. It's a quick visit, but an interesting one for understanding the historical and religious importance of the city.

In our opinion, this is not a visit to be planned as a highlight of the day, but rather a natural stopover during your discovery of the historic center.

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3. Reaching Cala Porta Vecchia from the old town

Cala Porta Vecchia is **Monopoli's best-known beach**, not least because it lies at the foot of the historic center. It's one of the city's most photogenic spots, with ramparts, white houses and the sea just below.

It's clearly a must-see for the view and the atmosphere. On the other hand, it's not necessarily the beach we'd recommend for spending several hours swimming, especially in high season. It can quickly become very crowded and space is limited.

Come back in the evening to enjoy a magnificent sunset over the Adriatic.

In our opinion, Cala Porta Vecchia is perfect for a quick break, a few photos, or a swim if you're already in the center. For a real beach afternoon, we preferred the coves further south of Monopoli.

4. Along the ramparts to Charles V castle

From Cala Porta Vecchia, you can walk along the seafront to Castello Carlo V, or Charles V Castle. It's a short but pleasant stroll, with several viewpoints overlooking the sea and the facades of the historic center.

The castle is one of Monopoli's most emblematic monuments. **In our view, however, its appeal lies mainly in the outside world.** Our advice is to walk past it, enjoy the view and continue towards the old port. Unless you have a particular interest in local history or an interesting temporary exhibition at the time of your visit, it's not necessarily essential to plan a lengthy tour of the interior.

This is typically the kind of place that should be incorporated into a walk, rather than treated as an unmissable visit in its own right.

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5. Porto Antico and its blue boats

Porto Antico is one of our favorite spots in Monopoli. This small, ancient port, with its traditional blue boats, offers a very typical image of Puglia. It's a simple place, but really charming, especially in the early morning or at the end of the day.

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It's also a good place to take a break while visiting the center. Here you can feel more of Monopoli's maritime identity, beyond its white streets and beaches. The port isn't large, but it's one of the places that give the town its character.

Don't miss the little stone passageway linking the port to the old town: postcard guaranteed.

If we had to choose, we found the old port more interesting than some of the monuments to visit. It doesn't require a lot of time, but it leaves a real impression.

6. Take a break in Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi

Piazza Giuseppe Garibaldi is one of the most pleasant squares in the historic center. It is surrounded by restaurants, cafés and terraces, making it a good landmark during your visit.

It's a convenient place to take a break, have a drink or simply observe the city's atmosphere. In the evening, the square becomes more animated, allowing you to enjoy Monopoli without necessarily having a precise program.

As is often the case in Apulian towns, it's not just the monuments that make a visit

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worthwhile, but also those simpler moments: sitting on a terrace, walking aimlessly,
returning to the same spot at different times of the day.

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Book a guided tour of Monopoli

If you'd like to book a **guided bike tour of Monopoli**, to learn more about **its history and get to know all the local anecdotes and good addresses**, we recommend [this excursion](#).

[Book a guided tour of Monopoli](#)

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Practical information for visiting Monopoli

Where to sleep in Monopoli?

We recommend **staying in** or near **the historic center of Monopoli**. In our opinion, this is the best way to enjoy the city without taking the car, especially in the evening, when the alleys, squares and terraces become busier.

It's also what we preferred during our stay: leave the car behind, do everything on foot, and emerge calmly after the day's sightseeing or beach activities. Monopoli is a good base if you're looking for a lively town that's pleasant on foot and well placed for exploring the coast.

Demand picks up quite early, especially for July, August and spring weekends. If you want to stay in the center of town or in charming accommodation, we advise you to book in advance.

- **→Notre Our favorite:** [Palazzo Indelli](#), a beautiful establishment right in the center, on a pretty square. Everything is done on foot. Comfortable bedding and impeccable cleanliness during our stay.

[□ Info and booking for Palazzo Indelli](#)

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- Another [budget option - Dimora Minelli Suites](#): pretty rooms in the center of Monopoli.

[□ Info and booking for the Dimora Minelli Suites hotel](#) (from €115 per night)

Are you looking for a **place to stay during your stay in Puglia ?** Find our tips and addresses in [Where to stay in Puglia](#) Italy: hotels, small hotels and **unusual accommodation**.

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Where to eat in Monopoli Our tried and tested addresses

Monopoli is a great place to go out in the evening. The historic center is lively, the terraces fill up quickly and the atmosphere is really pleasant after a day of sightseeing or a day on the beach.

We tried out a few addresses during our stay. Here are the ones we can share with you, with our opinion, including when we were less convinced by the experience.

The King Street Food

[The King Street Food](#) is a good address if you're looking for a quick and easy option in the center of Monopoli. It's convenient for eating on the go, without having to spend a long time in a restaurant.

We recommend this address if you want an easy break during your visit, or if you're looking for something more casual than a full restaurant meal.

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Magnapulia

[Magnapulia](#) is another address we tried out in Monopoli. It's in the historic center, which makes it very convenient if you want to stay in the old town for dinner or lunch.

It's a simple, well-located address, which we found pleasant for enjoying the atmosphere of Monopoli without straying too far from the narrow streets and lively squares.

Bella Blu Gelateria

We also tried [Bella Blu Gelateria](#), but it's not an address we'd particularly recommend. The experience didn't really convince us, especially for a gelato in Italy, where one often expects better.

This feedback is personal, but we'd like to make it clear. In Monopoli, as in many tourist towns, not all well-placed addresses are equal.

How to get to Monopoli

From Bari

Monopoli is located on the **Adriatic coast south of Bari**, just over 40 km away. Allow around 45 minutes [by car](#), depending on traffic. Regional trains also run frequently on this route.

From Alberobello

We spend the night before in [Alberobello](#). [Polignano a Mare](#) is reached in ~30 minutes, then **Monopoli** in a further ~15 minutes. It's a fast and pleasant connection.

Do I need to hire a car to visit Monopoli?

You don't **need a car to visit Monopoli's historic center**. Once parked, you can do everything on foot: the narrow streets, the cathedral, Cala Porta Vecchia, the castle, the old port and the restaurants in the center.

On the other hand, [if you want to visit Puglia](#) more widely, we think the car is still

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the best option (we've [written a dedicated article](#)). You can easily reach the beaches south of Monopoli, Polignano a Mare, [Alberobello](#), Locorotondo, Ostuni or [Lecce](#), without having to depend on bus or train timetables.

We simply advise you to be vigilant about driving, which can be quite sporty in Italy, and especially in the ZTLs. As in many Italian cities, the historic center of Monopoli has a limited traffic zone reserved for local residents and authorized vehicles. If you enter without authorization, you risk a fine.

Overall, our advice is simple: park outside the historic center, then walk into the old town. This avoids the stress of narrow streets, complicated maneuvers and the risk of mistakenly entering a ZTL.

To compare car rental offers, we use [DiscoverCars](#).

The comparator is easy to use and often finds good prices from Bari airport. During our search, we found a car at around 30 euros per day for pick-up in Bari. Don't forget to compare insurances: those offered via the comparator are often less expensive than those added directly at the rental counter.

Where can I park for free in Monopoli?

The easiest way to visit Monopoli is to **park outside the historic center**. This allows you to **avoid the ZTL** and reach the old town on foot.

Our map shows a **free parking lot** about 15 minutes' walk from the historic center ([Parcheggio gratuito - Via Nazario Sauro, 70043 Monopoli BA, Italy](#)). This is a good option if you're arriving by car to visit Monopoli for a day, or if your accommodation doesn't offer parking.

In high season, it can be more difficult to find a place, especially in the late morning or late afternoon. In this case, try to arrive early, or ask your accommodation directly for advice. Some hotels and apartments know which parking lots are most convenient, depending on the period, and some addresses may offer parking solutions or partnerships.

Our advice remains the same as in many Puglian towns: it's better to walk for 10 to 15 minutes than to park as close to the center as possible. In Monopoli, it's often

simpler, quicker and much less stressful.

What to do around Monopoli

Monopoli is also interesting for its location. It's not only easy to get to the coast, but also to many of Puglia's must-see places in a very short time. If you spend 1 or 2 nights here, you can alternate between visiting the historic center, the beaches and excursions to the surrounding villages.

Enjoy the beaches around Monopoli

Monopoli is a good base if you want to alternate between sightseeing and swimming. Although the historic center is very pleasant, one of the real advantages of this stopover is that you can easily reach several beaches and coves around the city.

In our opinion, Cala Porta Vecchia is perfect for completing a visit to the historic center, but not necessarily for a real beach afternoon. If you want to spend more time by the water, it's best to allow a little more time and head for the beaches south of Monopoli.

1. Cala Porta Vecchia, the beach at the foot of the historic center

Cala Porta Vecchia is Monopoli's best-known beach, and above all the easiest to get to. It's right at the foot of the old town, making it easy to integrate into a walking itinerary through the historic center.

The setting is superb, with ramparts, white houses and the sea just below. It's clearly one of Monopoli's most photogenic spots.

On the other hand, it's not necessarily the beach we'd recommend for spending several hours on, especially in high season. It's small, central and therefore quickly crowded. For us, Cala Porta Vecchia is worth a visit for the view, a quick break or a swim at the end of your walk.

2. La Scaletta, our favorite beach around Monopoli

La Scaletta is one of our favorite beaches around Monopoli. It lies to the south of the

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town and offers a less urban atmosphere than Cala Porta Vecchia.

This is a good option if you're looking for a more pleasant beach where you can relax, enjoy the water and spend some real time by the sea. It does require a little more organization, especially if you don't have a car, but that's also what makes it more interesting in our opinion.

If you have a car during your stay in Puglia, we advise you to add it to your program, especially if you have planned a full day in Monopoli.

3. Porto Marzano, a pleasant beach south of Monopoli

Porto Marzano is another interesting beach to the south of Monopoli. It's a sheltered sandy cove with crystal-clear water, perfect for a more leisurely afternoon by the sea.

It can be a good alternative if you want to swim outside the historic center, in a setting more suited to a real beach break. It's also an interesting option in high season, although, as is often the case in Puglia, it's best to arrive fairly early.

On site, you'll find deckchairs, parasols, a bar/restaurant and paid parking. At the time of our visit, parking cost around €3. So it's a slightly more convenient beach than La Scaletta if you want a few services nearby.

4. Cala Paradiso, convenient if you're looking for more services

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Cala Paradiso may be of interest if you're looking for a more developed beach, with more on-site services. It's closer to the center than La Scaletta or Porto Marzano, which makes it convenient, but also very busy in summer.

The beach is pretty, with sand, a few rocks and clear water. In high season, we advise you to arrive early. If you don't, you may find that you have to settle on the rocks or that the place is already full.

On site, you'll find deckchairs, parasols, a bar/restaurant and paid parking. At the time of our visit, parking cost around €5. Not necessarily the wildest option in our opinion, but suitable if you want to spend several hours in one place with a minimum of comfort.

To sum up, we'd choose Cala Porta Vecchia for a quick break while visiting the center, La Scaletta for a more pleasant real swim, Porto Marzano as a good alternative with a few services, and Cala Paradiso if you're looking for a more convenient, serviced beach.

Explore the sea caves by boat

If you're staying in Monopoli for at least a full day, we recommend a boat trip to discover the Apulian coast from the sea. It's a great way to explore small sea caves, coves sometimes only accessible by boat, turquoise waters and coastal vistas.

One of the highlights of the trip is the area around Polignano a Mare, famous for its cliffs and rock caves. It's quite a different experience from visiting the historic center or the beaches around Monopoli, and a good option for a relaxing break during a road trip in Puglia.

We wouldn't necessarily recommend this activity if you're only spending a few hours in Monopoli. In that case, you'd be better off visiting the old town, Cala Porta Vecchia and the old port. On the other hand, if you're staying overnight or have a full day in the area, the boat trip can really round off your discovery of the coast.

♥ [Information and booking for the Polignano a Mare sea caves](#)

Discover Polignano a Mare

Polignano a Mare is just a few kilometers from Monopoli. It's one of Puglia's best-known towns, not least for its cliff-framed beach, spectacular views and historic center suspended above the sea.

We advise you to go early in the morning or late in the day, especially in high season. The town is beautiful, but can quickly become very crowded. If you have to choose, Polignano is more spectacular than Monopoli, but we found Monopoli a more pleasant place to sleep and enjoy the evening.

Visit Alberobello

From Monopoli, you can easily reach Alberobello, famous for its trulli, the white houses with conical roofs typical of Puglia. It's a very touristy stopover, but definitely worth a visit on your first trip to the region.

Here again, it's best to arrive early or at the end of the day to avoid the busiest hours. Alberobello can be visited fairly quickly, but it's worth taking the time to get

away from the more touristy streets.

A trip to Locorotondo

Locorotondo is one of the most beautiful villages in the Itria Valley. Its historic center is smaller and quieter than Alberobello's, but it has plenty of charm, with its white alleyways, flower-filled balconies and views over the countryside.

It's a great idea for an excursion from Monopoli if you want to discover a different, gentler and less seaside-oriented Puglia.

Reaching Ostuni, the white city

Ostuni lies a little further south, but is still easily accessible by car from Monopoli. Nicknamed the "white city", it's famous for its hilltop historic center, sloping streets and whitewashed facades.

It's a beautiful stopover, but requires a little more time than Polignano or the beaches near Monopoli. We advise you to include it if you have at least two days in the area, or if you're continuing on to southern Puglia.

Explore the Castellana caves

The Castellana caves may be a good option if you're looking for a different visit around Monopoli, especially in hot or less favorable weather. Located inland, they are one of the region's best-known natural sites.

It's not necessarily the excursion we'd prioritize for a very short first visit to Monopoli, but it can complement a longer stay in northern Apulia.

Our opinion of Monopoli in Apulia

Monopoli is one of the stops we really enjoyed during our stay in Puglia. It's not necessarily the town that impresses most at first glance, especially if you arrive after Polignano a Mare or Alberobello, but it has a real charm and a very pleasant gentle way of life.

In our opinion, Monopoli is especially worth a visit if you take the time to discover it without running. Half a day is enough to visit the historic center, see the Cathedral,

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Cala Porta Vecchia, Charles V Castle and Porto Antico. But if you really want to take in the atmosphere, we recommend spending a full day here, or even a night or two.

It's also a great base for exploring northern Apulia. You can visit the old town in the morning, reach the beaches to the south in the afternoon, go out in the evening in the historic center, and then easily set off for Polignano a Mare, Alberobello, Locorotondo or other villages in the Itria Valley.

So for us, Monopoli is a must on any road trip in Puglia, especially if you're looking for a pleasant, lively, well-placed town that's easier to live in than some of the region's more touristy destinations.

Before you leave and to **build your itinerary with the right steps**, you can complete your visit with our articles:

- [Itinerary of our Puglia road trip](#)
- [Our tips for renting a car to explore Puglia](#)
- [Our best hotels in Puglia](#)
- [Visit Matera](#)
- [What to do in Lecce](#)
- [Visit Polignano a Mare](#)
- [Puglia's most beautiful beaches](#)

Enjoy your trip to Puglia! And if you're planning a trip to Monopoli, don't hesitate to leave us a comment or write to us on [Instagram](#), we're always happy to reply.

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3 avis (5/5)

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