



8 Fun Things to Do in Polignano a Mare

Take a Boat Tour

If you only do one activity in Polignano a Mare, make it a boat tour. It's wild to see the buildings constructed right on the edge of the sea cliffs, and it's even wilder to drive a boat through the countless sea caves that are carved into the cliffs just below the city.

On the tour, you'll get a chance to explore the extensive network of sea caves that dot the coastline. There are more than 40 caves scattered along the cliffs. Some were just large enough for our boat to squeeze through, while others opened into massive caverns with soaring moss-covered ceilings, crystal-clear water, and even natural skylights overhead. It was incredible to see how the sea has sculpted the cliffs over thousands of years.

We also cruised by the internationally renowned Grotta Palazzese, an upscale restaurant built inside a natural sea cave. This cave has hosted banquets and parties since the 1700s, and today it's one of the most unique dining experiences in Italy. You can make reservations to dine here, but it was a little too pricey for our budget.

Along the way, our captain shared fascinating stories about the area. We passed a small fishing village that had been there for centuries. He told us that the life expectancy of its residents is around 90-100 years. He attributes it to eating a Mediterranean diet of fish and olive oil every day, living a low-stress lifestyle, and making love to their wives every night. That's a pretty good formula for a long and happy life!

We also passed by St. Paul's Island, also known as Hermit Rock. This tiny rocky outcrop is marked by a single cross, and legend has it that a monk lived his life in solitude and isolation on this little island until his death.

Our tour also included a relaxing aperitivo with snacks and drinks, plus time to swim in the crystal-clear Adriatic Sea. The water is chilly, but refreshing on a hot summer day.

The entire excursion lasted about 90 minutes, and this is the [boat tour](#) we booked,

Between the spectacular scenery, fascinating history, fun atmosphere onboard, and a fantastic captain, it ended up being one of our favorite experiences in Polignano a Mare.

Wander the Streets of Old Town

I fell hard for Polignano a Mare's old town. It is utterly charming with its maze of narrow cobblestone streets, whitewashed buildings, flower-filled stoops, and terraces with sweeping views of the Adriatic Sea.

The medieval centro storico is built right on the edge of a dramatic limestone cliff that towers 65 feet above the glistening Adriatic Sea. Around every corner you'll find another picturesque alleyway, hidden viewpoint, or charming café, making it one of the most photogenic towns in all of Puglia.

To enter the old town, you'll pass beneath the 16th-century Arco Marchesale, also known as Porta Grande. This impressive stone archway was built in 1530. It was once the only entrance through the fortified city walls and still marks the transition into the pedestrian-only historic center.

At the heart of the old town is Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, a lively town square lined with shops, cafés and restaurants. The square is anchored by two of Polignano a Mare's most notable landmarks, the Church of Saint Mary of the Assumption and the Palazzo dell'Orologio.

The Church of Saint Mary of the Assumption was originally consecrated in 1295, but has been expanded and restored over the centuries, blending Gothic and Baroque architectural styles. It's a beautiful church, and its bells can often be heard echoing through the narrow streets.

Palazzo dell'Orologio, or Clock Palace, is a small palace located adjacent to the church. Its historic 19th-century clock is still wound by hand using ropes.

My favorite part of Polignano a Mare is simply getting lost exploring the labyrinth of alleyways. The streets are full of character, with colorful shutters, overflowing flower pots, laundry hanging from balconies, lights draped overhead, and sweet little nonnas leaning out of Dutch doors to talk to their neighbors. It feels so authentic and full of life.

One morning, my sister and I woke up before sunrise to wander the empty streets before the crowds arrived. Watching the first light spill across the quiet stone lanes and empty piazzas felt like stepping onto a movie set. It was absolutely magical!

Take a Cooking Class

Did you even go to Italy if you didn't take a pasta cooking class?! This is one of the best ways to experience Italian culture, and it ended up being one of the most fun (and delicious!) activities we did in Polignano a Mare.

We booked this [2-hour Apulian cooking class](#) and absolutely loved the experience.

During the class, we learned to make orecchiette, a pasta that originated from the Puglia region. I was surprised to learn that the dough requires only two ingredients, semola flour and

hot water. Although the recipe is simple, there is definitely a learning curve to creating the unique shape of each piece of pasta.

Our chef was fantastic, and I loved that it felt like we were all one big family gathered around nonna's kitchen making pasta together.

We enjoyed a traditional aperitivo with light snacks and drinks while the pasta was cooking. My mouth was watering by the time it was ready, and we couldn't wait to dig in. It turned out so good, and I was happy she gave us the recipe so that we could make it at home.

Swim at Lama Monachile

No trip to Polignano a Mare is complete without visiting Lama Monachile, the town's most iconic landmark and one of the most photographed spots in all of Puglia.

This tiny crescent-shaped pebble beach is tucked between towering limestone cliffs, with crystal-clear water stretching out toward the Adriatic Sea and a dramatic backdrop of historic buildings stacked along the cliffs above.

On a warm day, the beach is filled with locals and tourists soaking up the Italian sunshine, swimming in the turquoise water, and enjoying a taste of dolce vita.

The beach is made of small pebbles that are uncomfortable to walk on, so bring water shoes if you plan to swim. Even though the water is chilly, you have to jump in at least once!

Lama Monachile is also famous for cliff jumping. You'll find several ledges of varying heights along the cliffs that are perfect for diving and jumping. The beach even hosts the annual [Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series](#) that has taken place every year since 2009.

Find the Best Viewpoints in the City

Polignano a Mare is such a photogenic place, and I love that there are so many scenic viewpoints and hidden terraces that offer the best views of the seaside city.

The most popular spot for photos is Pietra Piatta. This large flat cliff is located down a set of stairs behind the statue of Domenico Modugno, a popular Italian singer and actor who was born in Polignano a Mare. It offers a great vantage point to photograph the rugged cliffs and the Lama Monachile beach below.

For the classic postcard view of Lama Monachile, head to Belvedere su Lama Monachile, a scenic terrace next to the Aquamarea restaurant. This viewpoint offers a panoramic bird's-eye view of the famous beach, the turquoise water, and the colorful buildings perched along the cliffs.

If you want to catch a glimpse of the Grotta Palazzese cave restaurant, head to Belvedere Grotta Palazzese. You can only see a small handful of tables from here, but the view along the rugged coastline is still stunning.

Grotta dell'Arcivescovado is a hidden terrace that's tucked away between the buildings in old town. It offers great views looking toward the cliffs on the east end. You can also enjoy a meal with a view at Ristorante La Balconata, which sits right along the terrace.

One of the most charming streets to walk down is Via Roma. This lively street is lined with cafés, shops, and the famous illuminated lyrics from Domenico Modugno's beloved song "*Volare*" hanging overhead. As you walk down Via Roma, you'll notice several side streets that branch off and lead towards the water. If you follow them down, they'll end at the cliff's edge and offer great views of the coast.

As you continue towards the east, you'll reach Largo Grotta Ardito. This large platform offers a great view of the cliffs from the opposite end of town. From here, you can also stroll along the Lungomare Promenade, a scenic coastal walkway with beautiful views.

Finally, don't miss Ponte Borbonico Lama Monachile. This stunning 19th-century stone arched bridge frames the entrance to Lama Monachile beach. Standing on the bridge gives you one of the best overhead views of the beach and the dramatic cliffs surrounding it.

Eat at an Outdoor Cafe

There is something so magical about dining outside on a sun-drenched patio during an Italian summer. Throughout our trip, we made it a point to enjoy every meal al fresco, and those slow evenings spent lingering over delicious food quickly became some of our favorite memories.

We ate our first meal in Polignano a Mare at Pizzeria Bella Mbriana, and it was the perfect introduction to the town. We enjoyed the most delicious baked gnocchi and caprese salad while sitting in the heart of Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II. As the sun set, the lights around the piazza began to glow, church bells echoed through the narrow streets, and the whole town seemed to come alive. It was one of those effortlessly beautiful Italian evenings that we'll never forget.

Aquamarea is one of the most Instagram-famous places to eat in Polignano a Mare, thanks to its incredible patio overlooking Lama Monachile. We weren't able to get a dinner reservation, but we did snag a table for brunch. We were surprised at the portion sizes, it was almost comical how tiny our pastries were for the price, but it was still a fun experience to enjoy breakfast with one of the most iconic views in town.

Our favorite pizza was from Neuro Ristorante Pizzeria, located right in the piazza. The crust was perfectly thin and chewy, and they had an amazing variety of creative toppings and flavor combinations. We've been home for a few weeks now, and I'm still dreaming about it!

Another restaurant we loved was Begula Club. I was immediately drawn to the charming outdoor patio with twinkling lights overhead, but unfortunately, the rain started just as we sat down. We moved inside and ended up loving the cozy atmosphere, with exposed stone walls and flickering candles. We ordered the ravioli and carbonara, and both dishes were divine.

For a more casual option, Pic Nic il Bistrot di Casa Mia has a huge menu with plenty of options for every type of traveler. While it wasn't our top meal of the trip, it was still a solid choice. I ordered their unique deep-fried crust pizza, which was pretty good (although I probably don't want to know the calorie count!). My sister ordered the lasagna, and she loved it.

And of course, no trip to Italy is complete without gelato! We made it our mission to sample as many gelaterias as possible during our 11 days in Italy, and Caruso Gelateria Bar was one of our favorites. Their small-batch gelato is made fresh daily with high-quality ingredients and real mix-ins, and it was some of the best gelato we had on the entire trip.

Stay in Old Town

For the full Polignano a Mare experience, I highly recommend staying in the heart of the historic old town. There is something so special about stepping outside your door and immediately being surrounded by charming cobblestone streets, local cafés, and breathtaking views of the Adriatic.

We stayed at [Trame-La Naca sul Porto](#) and loved our cozy little room. The location couldn't be better, especially for the price. It is tucked just around the corner from Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II and within walking distance of restaurants, cafés, and the famous Belvedere su Lama Monachile viewpoint.

Breakfast is included with your stay, and you can enjoy it in the charming breakfast room or on the rooftop terrace while taking in the views.

What stood out most about our stay was the incredible hospitality. The staff was genuinely kind, helpful, and went above and beyond to make sure we had a great experience. They even came to our rescue at 12:30 a.m. when we accidentally locked our key inside the room!

If you're looking for a more luxurious stay, consider [San Michele Suites](#). For a truly unforgettable experience, splurge on a room with a window or balcony overlooking Lama Monachile. Waking up to that iconic view would be absolutely magical.

Take a Day Trip to Nearby Towns

One of the best things about staying in Polignano a Mare is its convenient location near some of Puglia's most charming and unique destinations. With so many incredible towns nearby, it's the perfect home base for exploring more of the region.

While planning our trip, I was hoping to visit Matera and Alberobello while in Puglia, but we didn't have a rental car, trains don't connect to these towns, and taxis are expensive.

However, we booked this [self-guided tour](#), and it ended up being the perfect solution. The tour included round-trip transportation on a comfortable, air-conditioned coach bus, then gave us plenty of free time to explore each destination at our own pace. It was an affordable and stress-free way to visit two places that were high on our Puglia bucket list.

If you prefer a more structured experience with a local expert sharing the history and hidden details of each destination, this [guided tour](#) is a great option.

For a more personalized experience, you can also book a private tour with your own driver. This [private tour](#) is surprisingly affordable and has excellent reviews. Just note that it departs from Bari, so you'll need to take the short train ride there before meeting your driver.

Our first stop was Matera, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. The city is famous for its ancient *Sassi* cave dwellings, which were carved directly into the rock and date back more than 9,000 years. Walking through the maze of stone streets felt like stepping back in time, and it was unlike anywhere else we've visited in Italy.

Next, we visited Alberobello. This whimsical fairytale village is known for its high concentration of traditional trulli homes. It felt like we were exploring a storybook village as we wandered through the narrow streets lined with the white-washed houses with cone roofs. Like Matera, Alberobello is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is truly one of the most unforgettable and photogenic places in Puglia.

If you have extra time, there are several other beautiful towns near Polignano a Mare that are worth adding to your itinerary. Bari, Monopoli, Ostuni, and Lecce are all accessible by train, and each offers its own unique charm, from historic old towns to stunning coastal views.

Final Thoughts

While most visitors to Italy spend their time in famous destinations like Rome, Tuscany, and the Amalfi Coast, Polignano a Mare still feels like an insider's secret waiting to be discovered. What I loved most about this charming seaside town was its authentic atmosphere, slower pace, and effortless Italian charm. It also makes the perfect home base for exploring more of the beautiful Puglia region.

We found that three days was the ideal amount of time to experience the best of Polignano a Mare, but I easily could have stayed another day or two to visit other nearby towns and just relax by the sea. If you're planning a trip to Italy, don't overlook this incredible corner of Puglia, and be sure to add Polignano a Mare to your itinerary!