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# Liz Earle

WELLNESS WISDOM YOU CAN TRUST

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## Stay at the Palazzo Ducale Venturi

Named after the Roman goddess of wisdom, Minervino di Lecce is the village location of the glorious Palazzo Ducale Venturi. This 16th-century palace has been meticulously restored into a 20-room five-star boutique hotel, boasting a stellar restaurant, indoor and outdoor pool, luxury spa with Puglia's first Cryosauna, and a wealth of tailored experiences to enjoy, from cookery to cycling.

The whole building is steeped in centuries of secrets and intrigue. Legends abound about underground tunnels, forbidden love affairs, a curse and – this being Italy – salvation from a saint. Restored under the watch of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Palazzo hasn't lost any of its original charm – with vaulted ceilings, frescos and antiques alongside modern comforts. What was once the armoury is now a state-of-the-art fitness centre and spa, while the old olive oil mill has been transformed into a floatation pool.



Words: Camilla Cary-Elwes

In the hotel's restaurant, chef Antonio Russo champions regional fare to create sublime dishes inspired by Salento's abundant culinary traditions. Breakfast breads, pastries and cakes are made from scratch in his kitchen daily, alongside inventive tasting menus. One gastronomic experience not to be missed is the whisky-pairing dinner, where whiskies from around the world are matched with classic Pugliese cuisine. Who knew octopus and wild fennel with broad bean purée and rosemary croutons complemented Irish whiskey so beautifully?

Chef Antonio is also on hand to teach guests how to make their own Pugliese dishes. Try your hand at conjuring local pasta specialities from scratch – *sagne ncannulate*, twisted ribbons said to imitate the Baroque architecture of the area, or the little ear-shaped *orecchiette* – plus breads and pizzas using the Palazzo's historic salt ovens.

The Palazzo is a fabulous base from which to explore the wider region's elaborate Baroque architecture, twisting medieval streets and, of course, miles of coastline. Manager Martina and her super-helpful team will happily arrange all manner of outings. Walk from nearby Otranto town around the coast, through fragrant pine forests and past abandoned watchtowers, to take a dip overlooking Cape Palascia, the easternmost point of Italy – an especially spectacular spot at sunrise. Or, in the heat of the day, nothing beats a boat tour around the shoreline, stopping off at quiet coves to cool down in the dazzling Adriatic.

## Puglia



When it comes to unwinding, the Palazzo comes into its own. Lie by the saltwater pool with a caffè Leccese (iced espresso with a dash of almond syrup), watching the flittering swallows, or take relaxation to the next level with Daniela's deep-tissue or aromatherapy massage to target problem areas or simply shed stress.

The jewel in the Ducale Venturi's wellness crown has to be its Cryosauna, however. Step into the unit for three minutes, while temperatures plummet up to  $-190^{\circ}\text{C}$ , for an immunity and endorphin boost to remember. It's a short, sharp shock to the system but the resulting feeling of euphoria remains for hours. 🍷

Nightly rates from €200, based on two people sharing a room, on a bed and breakfast basis  
[palazzoducaleventuri.com](http://palazzoducaleventuri.com)

