

Guided small group cycling tour

The Coast of the Sirens

Amalfi Coast & Cilento National Park

Enjoy the best of Campania Felix : from the unknown Cilento
to the dramatic Amalfi Coast



8-day cycling tour with different bases in charming hotels & agriturismo's



Spring & Autumn 2012

Tour Organizer: Genius Loci Travel – Salerno (Italy)

Intensity / Skill rating: 3, moderate (intermediate skills)

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Introduction

The regions of Amalfi and the Cilento have been known as a paradise on earth from ancient times on. The Greeks built some of their most impressive temples here and under the Romans they formed part of 'Campania Felix' or the Happy Land. When travelling here, one easily becomes overwhelmed by the well known cultural and natural attractions of the famous 'Costiera Amalfitana' with its towering cliffs and picturesque coves. However also the Cilento region south of Salerno, now one of Italy's biggest National Parks where the coastline bulges out into an expanse of mountainous landmass, is well worth a visit.

This tour gives us the opportunity to discover both the busy touristic Amalfitan and the quiet peaceful Cilento coast. We will start from the little fishermen's village of Marina di Camerota in the far south of the Cilento and cycle up north along the coast sampling dreamy coastal scenery, wild mountain valleys and deep gorges and attractive countryside with vineyards and olive groves. On the first part of our tour in the Cilento National Park we pass along world famous cultural sites included in the UNESCO's list of World Heritage such as Velia and Paestum and visit some of the nicest medieval villages of the area, both along the coast and slightly inland, where the traditional way of life is still evident. All these attractions are linked together by great well paved and quiet roads, ideal for cycling. Of course there will also be plenty of time to enjoy the splendid beaches and wonderful food on offer.

During the second part of our trip along the 'Costiera Amalfitana' we follow the spectacular coastal road from Vietri sul Mare to Amalfi and then onwards to the very tip of the Sorrentine peninsula at Punta Campanella and the isle of Capri. We will admire the colourful table ware ceramics of Vietri, have a cup of coffee at the little bar on the beach of delightful Cetara and walk on the beautiful seaside boulevard of Minori. From our base at Amalfi we will visit the deeply eroded and amazing 'Fjord' of Furore, explore mundane Positano and cycle through the little hamlets of Atrani, Praiano and Conca dei Marini. We end our tour with a trip round the peninsula, passing through the coastal resort of Massa Lubrense and famous Sorrento.

On this amazing cycling adventure we will see with our own eyes that not only the Amalfi Coast has become with reason Italy's most famous coastline, but discover an entirely new and little known, but equally beautiful part of Italy in the Cilento National Park. It will become clear that it takes only a little effort to get 'off the beaten track', finding ourselves surrounded by nature at only a few hundred metres away from the crowds. In short, we'll discover a real Coast of the Sirens.



Please note: this is a moderate tour which is suitable for all those who have some experience with bicycle touring and are in a good general physical condition. On some of the inland stretches you may encounter some steeper climbs. Average cycling times: approx 5-6 hours each day.

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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 0 Naples (or Salerno)

Arrival in Naples (or Salerno) in case you arrive a day earlier.

Naples has an international airport. From Rome (and many other cities) Naples and Salerno can easily be reached. There are regular AV (High-Speed), Eurostar and Intercity trains: travel time by High-Speed train: about one hour; cost around € 40,00), by IC-train: about two hours; cost around € 20,00; by normal, regional trains the cost is about 11 euro, and it takes almost 3 hours). Several hotels can be booked in Naples and Salerno, according to your wish (either 'downtown' centrally located, or near the harbour or train station, ranging from 3 to 5-star).

N.B. If you arrive one day earlier you have the possibility to pay a visit to the world famous archaeological museum In Naples, where all the artefacts from Pompeii and Herculaneum are exposed, and/or the equally wonderful Capodimonte museum. Also is it possible to make a day trip to Pompeii.

Day 1 Arrival – Marina di Camerota

After arriving in our hotel at Marina di Camerota on the southern Coast of the Cilento National Park we leave our luggage at the hotel and take hold of our bicycles. Depending on our arrival time we may already take an optional non-guided short trip to test our bicycles, or alternatively go for a stroll through the tiny fishermen's village and lounge on the beach. In the afternoon we will meet with our tour guide and the rest of the group in time for dinner after which we attend a short introductory briefing on the tour.

Hotel in Marina di Camerota – HB

Day 2 Marina di Camerota and Monte Bulgheria round trip

After an early breakfast, we start our first cycling day with a wonderful stretch uphill along the southern coast of the Cilento National Park. During this first scenic climb we enjoy an unparalleled view of one of the most unspoilt stretches of coastline in southern Italy. After passing through the little hamlet of Lentiscola, we have a rest and a drink in the charming village of San Giovanni a Piro, beautifully located with spectacular views on the Gulf of Policastro. From here we start down and slightly up again towards the villages of Bosco and Acquavena, keeping the impressive lime stone crags of Monte Bulgheria to our left. After reaching the valley of the Mingardo River we continue for a short visit to the charming village of Roccagloriosa, nestled on a rocky hill high above the valley floor. After a cup of coffee or a cappuccino in the village square we continue downhill along the river towards the entrance of the impressive Mingardo canyon dominated by the abandoned medieval village of San Severino. Another scenic climb brings us to some marvellous lookout points over the canyon before arriving in the broad valley of Licusati. From here we pass the scenic village of Camerota dominated by the ruins of its castle and then whizz back down to the coast. *Distance : 52,5 km – Cycling time : 4 hours*

Hotel in Marina di Camerota - HB

Day 3 Marina di Camerota – Palinuro – Casalvelino

Today we will follow the panoramic coastal road north to our agriturismo in the plain of the Alento River. From Marina di Camerota we start on a beautiful road along the coast hemmed in between the sea and steep rock cliffs to the headland of Capo Palinuro. This promontory, named after one of the helmsmen of the mythical hero Aeneas, is one of the most famous spots of the Cilento National Park. Its particular topography made up of dazzlingly high rock cliffs full of sea grottos, amongst which the wonderful 'Grotta Azzurra', makes for a wonderful sight. We take our bicycles into the little village of Palinuro and halt at the tiny port. Those who wish can make a short boat tour of the cape, visiting the caves. We then cycle on along the west coast of the Cilento towards the medieval hill top village of Pisciotta. The road now passes through fragrant Mediterranean maquis and centuries old olive groves, all the while offering fantastic views on the sea. At the end of the afternoon we reach Ascea, from where we descend to the coast and to the archaeological site of Velia, home to the Greek philosophers Zeno and Parmenides, and cradle of one of Europe's most ancient schools of medicine. Amongst its remains one finds the celebrated 'Porta Rosa' (Pink Gate), one of the first examples of the use of the vault in Greek architecture. After a short visit we continue the last few km through the coastal plain of the Alento River. Here we stay in a nice agriturismo, with superb food. *Distance : 40 km – Cycling time : 3- 4 hours*

Hotel in Casalvelino – HB

Day 4 From Casalvelino to Paestum by way of Acciaroli and Agropoli

This morning we start out on the flat road to the sea resort of Casalvelino Marina, from where our trip continues along the hilly road running all along the spectacular coast to Agropoli and Paestum. This is definitely one of the finest coastal rides in Italy, alternating wonderful views with charming seaside villages. Slightly along the coast we pass through the fishermen's village of Pioppi, another delightful little town. Here we can visit the small Sea Life Museum dedicated to the local marine fauna and flora. Pioppi is also famous as the second home town of the American professor Ancel Keys, father of the so-called Mediterranean Diet. We may then stop for a drink in Acciaroli, where back in 1952 Ernest Hemmingway spent some holidays and – some say – was inspired to write 'The Old Man and the Sea'. Some of the village's elders still remember having met the great author and may be willing to tell us a strong tale or two. By lunch time we reach Ogliastro Marina, on the peninsula of Licoso, famous for its Aleppo Pines. Here we have a lazy lunch in the shade and then take some time for a swim. After a last easy climb that takes us a bit inland again we descend to Agropoli, at the southern edge of the fertile plain of Paestum. Few more km bring us to Paestum itself, where we sleep at a few metres from the Greek temples, just outside the ancient city walls. In case we have some time left we may well visit the archaeological site dating back to the 6th century BC (UNESCO World Heritage!), where we will admire not only the temples, but also several other monuments. *Distance : 54,5 km – Cycling time : 4-5 hours*

Hotel in Paestum – HB



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Day 5 Paestum to the Amalfi Coast

Today we start with a short ride around the city walls of Paestum. In case we did not have the time to visit the site the day before, we can do so now, or we can have a look at the equally interesting museum, exploring its collections of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculpture. Not to miss the so-called '*Tomba del Tuffatore*' (Diver's Tomb), rare example of Greek funeral painting. After that we transfer by train to Salerno, gateway to the Amalfi Coast. Here we have time to look around the old city and grab some lunch. We then hop on our bicycles again and head for Vietri sul Mare, renowned for its colourful table ware ceramics. From Vietri the beautiful winding coastal road, defined by some 'the most scenic ride in the world', takes us to splendid medieval Amalfi. Our first stop is in the idyllic village of Cetara, named after the Roman '*cetus*', tuna fish, which still produces some of the world's finest. Then it goes on to Capo d'Orso, the highest point of the road, and a wonderful outlook on the whole of the Amalfi Coast and Capri. After admiring the view it goes on, now downhill on a beautiful winding road through lemon groves, forests and dramatic cliffs, until we arrive at Maiori, the biggest town on the coast. A short stretch around the headland brings us to Minori, with its nice little centre and beautiful seaside boulevard. Then we continue with a short climb towards Castiglione, once part of the defence system of the Amalfi Republic. Finally we pass through marvellous little Atrani with its whitewashed houses and arrive in Amalfi itself, our base for the last 3 nights. *Distance : 25 km – Cycling time : 2-3 hours*

Hotel in Amalfi – HB

Day 6 Amalfi Coast and Punta Campanella ride

Our day's trip takes us along the second half of the dramatic '*Strada Amalfitana*' to the marine reserve of Punta Campanella. We start with the short ride from Amalfi, through Praiano, to Positano, easily the most scenic – and mundane - of the villages on the coast. After Positano the coast becomes wilder and more rugged, and it is a good climb to arrive at the Colli di San Pietro, beautifully situated on the ridge that separates the Amalfi Coast from the rest of the Sorrentine Peninsula. We can now admire the wonderful panorama over the coast towards Capri, and the view of the plain stretching out towards Naples dominated by Mount Vesuvius. From here we then cycle towards the very end of the peninsula, Punta Campanella. From the very last village (indeed: called 'Termini') we have a great view on Capri. We return along the northern coast, with wonderful views of the Bay of Naples and again Mount Vesuvius, through the charming village of Massa Lubrense to Sorrento, tourist capital of the area. After passing through the city we continue high above the cliffs towards Sant'Agnello, Piano and Meta, all charming resorts, surrounded by citrus groves and with wonderful views on the coast. Then we climb back up to the Colli di San Pietro and we descend back to Positano and Amalfi, a wonderful experience just before the sunset, definitely one of the nicest stretches to do on a bike worldwide! Dinner is on your own tonight, you have the choice of several different pizzeria and restaurants. *Distance : 56 km – Cycling time : 5 hours*

Hotel in Amalfi - BB

Day 7 Freely exploring the Amalfi Coast

Today we have several options to see something of the amazing Amalfi Coast. Those who want can make a bike ride: either a shorter ride to Ravello and Scala with some time for sightseeing, or a longer, hard ride, over the ridge of the Lattari Mountains with some long ascents, past the Fausto Coppi monument! Others might opt for some sightseeing, a short walk, a canoe trip along the coast, or a boat trip to Capri. Amalfi offers many possibilities for everything. And of course there is also the beach to relax from the cycling. At night we make a great scenic boat ride to go for dinner in a nice restaurant in a beautiful inlet.

Hotel in Amalfi - HB

Day 8 End of the tour

The tour ends at Amalfi after breakfast today. A private transfer can take us back to Naples or Salerno. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic hotels or agriturismo's (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Dinners are included on all nights except on the 6th night at Amalfi when you are free to organize your own dinner in one of the many restaurants in the little town.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you stay.

Nights 1 & 2: The first two nights are spent in a nice 3-star hotel in the fishermen's village of Marina di Camerota. From the cosy hotel the whole of the village is within easy reach.

Night 3: This night is spent in an agriturismo situated near the village of Casalvelino in the Alento coastal plain, offering a taste of peaceful country life. Breakfast and dinner are based on local specialties.

Night 4: The next night you stay in a beautifully located 3-star hotel, just outside the archaeological area of Paestum. The hotel lays its own park and is within walking distances of the Greek temples.

Nights 5, 6 & 7: The last 3 nights you stay in Amalfi, the ancient capital of the Amalfi Coast. Our recently renovated 4-star hotel is located in a great position, right in the historical heart of the city at only a few metres from the sea shore.

INCLUSIONS

On our GUIDED TOURS we include almost everything:

- Private English speaking tour leader for 8 days
- Professional guiding service for each activity
- Accommodation: 2 nights Marina di Camerota, 1 night Casalvelino, 1 night Paestum, 3 nights Amalfi in good ***/**** hotels and agriturismo's
- Meals: 7 breakfasts, 6 dinners (good restaurants!)
- All private & public transfers as indicated throughout the entire itinerary
- Support van & mechanical assistance for the duration of the tour
- Special activities as outlined in the day by day itinerary
- 24/24 h local assistance
- Luggage transport

Not Included

- Departure taxes
- Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities

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- Tips
- Items of personal nature
- Bicycle rental (road racing bicycles available on request)

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate (3): Mostly moderate rides but with inevitably several climbs, only few of which are really strenuous. All roads are well paved and mostly quiet with little traffic except for some stretches near Paestum and along the Amalfi Coast. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on some days.

Fitness: Some experience with bicycle touring and a good general physical condition will certainly make your travel experience more enjoyable. You should be able to cycle for several hours a day also in hot dry weather conditions.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in MARINA DI CAMEROTA which can easily be reached by train from either Naples or Salerno. You will need a private transfer from the local train station of Pisciotta/Palinuro to your hotel. Naples has an international airport. From Rome (and many other cities) Naples and Salerno, and thus Marina di Camerota, can easily be reached.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast on day 8 in AMALFI. A short transfer can bring you to Salerno from where Naples is easily reachable.

TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to extend your tour with a few days at Salerno, along the beautiful Costiera Amalfitana or at Naples. Details and prices on request. Extra cycling and/or sightseeing options can be provided!

UPGRADE

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

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