



Mountains of Cilento Bike Challenge

Undiscovered cultural heritage and abundant nature in a pristine landscape



TRIP NOTES 2016

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INTRODUCTION

The region of Campania has been known as a paradise on earth since ancient times. The Greeks built some of their most impressive temples here and under the Romans it became known as 'Campania Felix', or the Happy Land. When travelling the region one becomes overwhelmed by its wealth of cultural and natural attractions, from the great city of Naples to the well-known 'Costiera Amalfitana', with its towering cliffs and picturesque coves.

But Campania's real secret is located south of Salerno. Here the coastline bulges out into an expanse of mountainous landmass known as the Cilento, now one of Italy's biggest National Parks, with World Heritage listing. This is an area offering endless possibilities to the road cyclist, amateurs and experienced semi-professionals alike. A few flat areas, mainly concentrated along the coast, immediately make way for rolling hill country punctuated by several low mountains. This makes for an interesting ride, where challenging climbs and exhilarating descents follow up at a breathtaking pace.

You will cycle past world-famous cultural sites, through pristine natural areas and along dreamy coastal scenery. Your trip will take you on small country roads, passing through rough mountain scenery as well as attractive countryside, with vineyards and olive groves. You'll visit some of the nicest medieval villages in the area, where the traditional way of life is still evident. And you'll enjoy visiting some of the Cilento's greatest cultural treasures, like the archaeological sites of Paestum and Velia and the ruins of the abandoned 18th-century town centre of Roscigno Vecchia. All connected by great well-paved and quiet roads, ideal for cycling.

After a short visit to the Greek temples, you move inland from the plain of Paestum, cycling through the Cilento's foothills, which offer wide views of its marvellous coastline. You'll pass through Trentinara, spectacularly located on top of a sheer rock cliff, pass through the valley of the Calore River and climb the high plateau of the Alburni Mountains. The next couple of days you will explore the mountainous inland of the region, descending into the Diano valley and climbing up the Cervati Mountains, before arriving at the Cilento's southern coast, dominated by Mount Bulgheria. Here you will enjoy marvellous views, launch yourselves into exhilarating descents and ride through deep gorges, before heading inland towards the 'piece de resistance' of your tour, taking on Monte Gelbison (1700 m.a.s.l.). During the final day you will briefly visit the Greek city of Velia and then tackle Monte Stella, passing through several of the villages dotting its slopes, before turning back to Agropoli and Paestum.



Please note: this is a hard tour even by road cycling standards, for which extensive experience of road cycling and a very good general physical condition are necessary to make your travel experience enjoyable. Average cycling times: approx. 6-8 hours each day.



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 by train. There are regular AV (high-speed), Eurostar and Intercity trains: journey by high-speed train = about 1 hour to Naples, 2 hours to Salerno, cost around € 40; by IC = about 2 hours to Naples, 3 hours to Salerno, cost around € 25; by regional trains = almost 3 hours, cost around €11). Several hotels can be booked in Naples and Salerno, according to your wishes (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 opportunity to pay a visit to the world-famous archaeological museum in Naples, where all the artefacts from Pompeii and Herculaneum are displayed, and/or the equally wonderful Capodimonte museum. It is also possible to make a day trip to Pompeii.

Day 1 Arrival – Paestum (Capaccio)

After your arrival in Capaccio you head for the hotel and get settled in. If you haven't brought your own bicycle, you first go and pick up your rental bike. The short trip back to your hotel takes you past the temples and city walls of Greek Paestum. Alternatively, you can go for a short ride in the countryside or head down to the beach for a quick dip. In the afternoon you will meet your tour guide and the rest of the group. Together you have an 'aperitivo', and attend a short briefing on the tour. In the evening you all get together for your first dinner.

Hotel in Paestum - HB

Day 2 From Paestum to Bellosuardo - Climbing up the Alburni Mountains

Before taking off for your first day's cycling trip, you take your time for a quick visit to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Paestum and its famous Greek temples. After your visit you are ready to saddle up and start your cycling adventure. From the archaeological site of Paestum, located in the plain of the Sele River, you head in the direction of the foothills of the Cilento area, passing first through Capaccio and then up to the village of Trentinara. This small village is spectacularly located, on top of a sheer rock face at 550 m.a.s.l., where you enjoy a magnificent view of the Paestum plain. The route then goes on to the village of Monteforte Cilento where you stop to fill up your water bottles, or why not have a cup of coffee or a cappuccino before tackling the climb to the saddle, located at 900 m.a.s.l., between Monte Chianello and Monte Vesole? A quick descent then takes you to Roccadaspide and through the valley of the Calore River to Controne, your gateway to the Alburni Mountains. You now start slowly climbing up again under the mountain's sheer cliffs, towards the Diano Valley, first to Sicignano degli Alburni with its imposing castle, and then through thick chestnut groves to Petina, located at 690 m.a.s.l. Here you have a break before launching yourselves into the hardest climb of the day, leading over a small steep road full of hairpin curves snaking up to the Alburni plateau. It is a 7 km and 600m climb, in the midst of thick chestnut and beech forest, up to the Aresta astronomical observatory, located at almost 1200 m.a.s.l.! During the climb you can admire the whole of the Diano Valley below you. From the Aresta observatory a long exhilarating descent brings you first to the little town of Sant'Angelo a Fasanella, and then to your evening's base at the lovely family-run agriturismo near the panoramic village of Bellosuardo. After a shower you can relax on the terrace while sipping an aperitif, taking in the wonderful view over the agriturismo's vineyards, before having a well-deserved dinner. *Distance : 107 km - Altitude gain : 2500 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 6 hours*

Agriturismo in Bellosuardo - HB



Day 3 From Bellosuardo to Bosco – Down to the Diano Valley and up the Cervati Mountains

Today's trip will take you down into the Diano Valley and then up again on the slopes of the Cervati Mountains, before you arrive at the hotel in the small village of Bosco, high above the southern coast of the Cilento. After breakfast you leave Bellosuardo and head in the direction of Corleto Monforte. From Corleto, situated at 600 m.a.s.l., you climb up to the '*Passo della Sentinella*' at 900 m.a.s.l., after which you enjoy a swift descent to the villages of San Rufo and San Pietro al Tanagro in the Diano Valley. Ahead you can now see the first mountains of the Basilicata region. You now head over the largely flat valley floor to the fortified town of Teggiano, squatting down high on its hilltop, and then start climbing up the first tough climb of the day. A 13 km climb takes you up from the valley floor near Teggiano (450 m.a.s.l.), to the '*Sella di Corticato*' pass located at 1023 m.a.s.l.! From the pass you then swiftly descend towards the village of Sacco, located directly beneath several high limestone cliffs. Here you stop and have a look at the old town centre, before moving on along the slopes of the Cervati Mountains, the very heart of the Cilento. You pay a short visit to the abandoned village of Roscigno Vecchia, the 'Pompeii of the 19th century', after which your route takes you to the village of Piaggine. It then goes on up again for the second hard climb of the day, which in 13 km takes you from 600 m.a.s.l. to 1200 m.a.s.l., all the while riding over small quiet roads through cultivated fields and wild forests, often without meeting any traffic for long stretches. It goes without saying that, after the strenuous climb, you are fully entitled to an exhilarating descent, taking you to the village of Rofrano first, and through Alfano and Torre Orsaia over a highly panoramic road to the hamlet of Roccagloriosa, clinging to a rocky hill in the middle of the valley floor. At the end of the day a gentle climb takes you to the little village of Bosco, situated beneath the high rocky cliffs of Monte Bulgheria, where you are expected at your typical, family-run hotel. *Distance : 126 km – Altitude gain : 2500m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 7 hours*

Hotel in Bosco - HB

Day 4 From Bosco to Ceraso – Around Monte Bulgheria and up to Monte Gelbison

Today's trip takes you from your hotel at Bosco to one of the Cilento's giants, Monte Gelbison, and then to the charming village of Ceraso, your base for the night. After leaving in the morning you first climb up gently to the village of San Giovanni a Piro, located high above the Gulf of Policastro, and then whiz down along the highly panoramic road, full of hairpin curves, to Marina di Camerota. After a short pause at the village square, where you can enjoy a cup of coffee or a cappuccino, you start climbing up to the village of Camerota, built on a rocky hill on top of steep vertical limestone cliffs. After visiting the well-preserved historical centre, you head to the hamlet of Licusati, and then launch yourselves in a fast descent on a highly scenic road leading down to the Mingardo Valley. After passing through the river's gorge, dominated by the medieval castle and abandoned village of San Severino, you turn inland towards Vallo della Lucania, passing by Futani and Cucaro Vetere. A long and steady climb takes you into the foothills of Mount Gelbis on to the scenic village of Novi Velia. Here you stop for a short break before tackling the hardest climb of the whole tour, from the village of Novi Velia to the Maria Sanctuary situated on the very top of the mountain. The well-paved road leading up is 13 km long, and climbs up from the village's 600 m.a.s.l. to the sanctuary's 1700 m.a.s.l.! After reaching the summit you stop for a well-deserved rest and enjoy the 360° view of the surroundings. You can easily see the Cervati and Alburni Mountains, Monte Bulgheria and, closer to the sea, Monte Stella, your goal for tomorrow. After a refreshing drink you head back to Novi Velia, enjoying the exhilarating descent of the mountain, and then continue to Ceraso. After a short stop to visit the splendid historical centre of the little town, you arrive at your agriturismo. A hot shower, followed by an '*aperitivo*' on the terrace with a view, and a hearty dinner based on the farm's own produce, is just what you need to regain your strengths. *Distance : 105 km – Altitude gain : 2625 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 6,5 hours*



Agriturismo in Ceraso - HB

Day 5 From Ceraso to Paestum – Up and around Monte Stella

After an early breakfast, you start your last cycling day with a wonderful stretch running slightly downhill towards Marina di Ascea. Here you have the opportunity to briefly visit the Greek city of Velia, home to the 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. From Velia you start climbing up the foothills of Monte Stella, first to Acquavella, and then on to Stella Cilento and Omignano, where you prepare for the final hard climb of your challenge. Here, from an altitude of 550 m.a.s.l., starts the 6 km-long winding road that will take you up to the summit of Monte Stella situated at 1130 m.a.s.l. On top, a wonderful view of the whole of the Cilento Coast is your reward. After whizzing down the same road again, you continue through the foothills of the mountain, passing through several of the quiet little villages dotting its slopes. While circling Monte Stella in an anti-clockwise direction you pass through Sessa Cilento, Serramezzana and San Mauro Cilento, cycling up and down and down and up again through the rolling hill country. You will most likely stop for a coffee or cappuccino and admire some of the villages' well-preserved medieval centres. From San Mauro you then descend towards the coast again and turn north along the panoramic coastal road, in the direction of Agropoli and Paestum. Before making your way into the Sele plain, however, you will once more climb up towards Perdifumo at 450 m. a.s.l. From here you reach the fortified village of Castellabate where you stop beneath the local '*castello*' to admire the view of the Tresino and Licosa peninsulas in front of you. Only a few km now divide you from Agropoli, where you can stop to have a look at the medieval '*acropolis*' from which the city takes its name. After a last refreshing drink, an easy road then takes you to your hotel in Paestum again. After arriving and freshening up, you can stroll by the Greek temples in the evening, going out for a pre-dinner aperitif, or an after-dinner '*gelato*'. *Distance : 121 km – Altitude gain : 2400m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 7 hours*

Hotel in Paestum - HB

Day 6 End of the tour

The tour ends in Paestum after breakfast today. A private transfer can take you to the local train station where you can easily catch a train to Salerno or Naples. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

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

Dinners are included on all nights.

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 you will be passing through.

Night 1: The first night is spent in a beautifully located 3-star hotel, just outside the archaeological site of Paestum. The hotel has its own park and is within walking distances of the Greek temples.

N.B. *Those bringing their own bikes by car can leave the car on the premises of the first hotel in Paestum for the duration of the whole tour.*

Night 2: This night is spent in a wonderfully located agriturismo, situated near the village of Bellosguardo in the Alburni foothills. Breakfast and dinner are based on local specialties.

Night 3: Tonight you stay in a nice 3-star hotel in the little village of Bosco, beautifully located under the rocky cliffs of Monte Bulgheria.

Night 4: This night is spent in a peaceful agriturismo in Ceraso, offering a taste of peaceful country life.

Night 5: The last night is spent in the hotel at Paestum again.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

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

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Hard (4/5): Difficult rides with several climbs, some of which can be quite long and strenuous, even by road cycling standards. All roads are well paved and mostly quiet, with little traffic except for some stretches near Paestum. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on most days.

Fitness: Extensive experience of road bicycling and a very good general physical condition are necessary to make your travel experience enjoyable. You should be able to cycle for several hours a day and long distances even in hot dry weather conditions.



INCLUSIONS

On our GUIDED TOURS we include almost everything:

- Private English-speaking tour leader for the duration of the tour
- Professional guiding service for each activity
- Accommodation: 2 nights Paestum, 1 night Bellosuardo, 1 night Bosco, 1 night Ceraso in good *** hotels and agriturismos
- Meals: 5 breakfasts, 5 dinners
- All private & public transfers as indicated throughout the entire itinerary
- Support van & mechanical assistance for the duration of the tour
- Entrance fees of all sites along the itinerary
- Special activities as outlined in the day-by-day itinerary
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport

Not Included:

- Departure taxes
- Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature
- Bicycle rental (high quality road racing bikes. You may want to bring your own saddle and pedals)

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in PAESTUM, which can easily be reached by train from either Naples or Salerno. Naples has an international airport. From Rome (and many other cities) Naples and Salerno, and thus Paestum, can easily be reached.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in PAESTUM on day 6. A short transfer can bring you to the local train station where you can easily travel on to Salerno and Naples.

TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

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

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