



Paestum and Cilento Bike Challenge

Discovering the Cilento National Park, one of the biggest and most diverse in Italy



TRIP NOTES 2016

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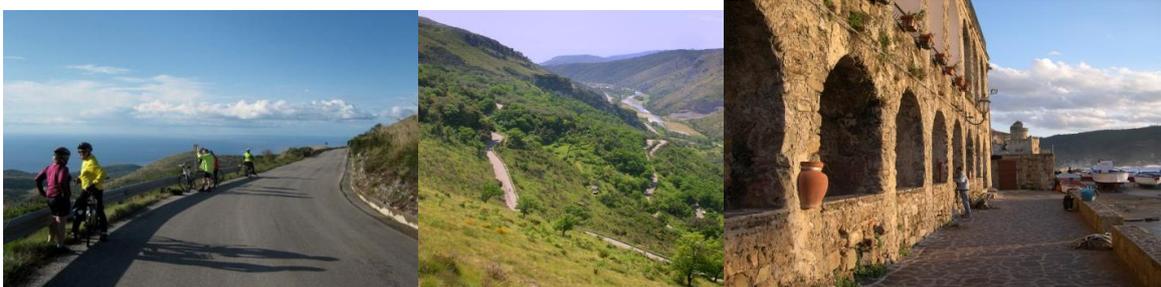
INTRODUCTION

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 more 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 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 sites of Greek Paestum and Velia, and the ruins of Roscigno Vecchia. All connected by wonderful well-paved and quiet roads, ideal for road cycling.

The first day you will 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, and stop at Felitto near the Calore River, where you can admire several medieval bridges. The next couple of days you will explore the mountainous inland of the region, circling the Alburni Mountains and maybe even climbing up to its high plateau, visiting the marvellous limestone caves of Castelcivita. You will then pass through the wild nature of the Cervati Massif on your way to Marina di Camerota on the Cilento's south coast. From Marina you then discover the pristine mountainous area above the Gulf of Policastro, dotted with little hidden hamlets such as Morigerati and Sicilì, and pass underneath the towering limestone cliffs of Monte Bulgheria. The next day you continue through the rolling hills of the coastal area to Casalvelino. On your way you will have plenty of opportunities to admire the wide views that open up along the way. On your last day you tackle Monte Stella, passing through several of the villages dotting its slopes, before turning back along the coastal road to Agropoli and Paestum.



Please note: this is a moderate to hard tour for which experience of road cycling and a good general physical condition are necessary to make your travel experience enjoyable. Average cycling times: approx. 5-7 hours each day. Please note that for complete groups this tour is also available as a 6-day tour.



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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 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

After your arrival at Paestum you head for the hotel and get settled in. If you haven't brought your own bicycle, you will 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, definitely worth a visit. The temples are among the best preserved and the whole archaeological site is of great interest. Its UNESCO World Heritage status is not without merit! Alternatively, you can go for a short ride 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 you'll attend a short briefing on the tour. In the evening you all join together for your first dinner.

Hotel in Paestum - HB

Day 2 Paestum to Bellosguardo

Before setting off for your first day's cycling trip, you take your time to visit the famous Greek temples of Paestum, in case you didn't get the chance to yesterday. After your visit you are ready to hop on your bikes and start the cycling adventure. From the archaeological site of Paestum you head towards the foothills of the Cilento area, passing first through Ogliastro Cilento and then towards Cicerale. From Cicerale you cycle through lush countryside to the village of Trentinara, spectacularly located on top of a sheer rock face, where you enjoy a magnificent view of the Paestum plain. The road then goes on to the villages of Monteforte Cilento and Magliano Vetere. Along your way you have plenty of time for a refreshing stop in one of the villages to fill up your water bottles, or why not have a cup of coffee or a cappuccino? You will stop for lunch along the road, either at Magliano Vetere or shortly after. After lunch you enter the valley of the Calore River, passing by Fellitto and Castel San Lorenzo. Along this stretch of your trip you can admire several medieval bridges crossing the river, all the while cycling through beautiful countryside on quiet, well-paved roads. The last part of your day's trip takes you to your lovely family-run agriturismo near the panoramic village of Bellosguardo. Here you have the opportunity to relax on your terrace while sipping a glass of wine, taking in the wonderful view over the agriturismo's vineyards before having a well-deserved dinner, based on local produce.

Distance : 83 km - Altitude gain : 1670m - Cycling time (no breaks included): 5 hours

Agriturismo in Bellosguardo - HB



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Day 3 Roundtrip of the Alburni Mountains

Today you will make a roundtrip of the Alburni Mountains, taking you from the Cilento area into the Diano Valley and back again. After breakfast you leave Bellosguardo and head in the direction of Corleto Monforte. You climb up to the 'Passo della Sentinella', after which you enjoy a swift descent to the villages of San Rufo and San Pietro al Tanagro. Ahead you see the Diano Valley and, behind it, the first mountains of the Basilicata region. When arriving at the valley floor you turn north and start following the Tanagro River towards Polla. You now start cycling underneath the high limestone cliffs of the Alburni Mountains, first slowly climbing up to the village of Petina, and then down again through thick chestnut groves to Sicignano degli Alburni. Here you will stop for lunch and a short visit to this small town with its imposing castle. Shortly after Sicignano you start heading south again. You now pass directly underneath the sheer cliffs and reach Controne. At the next village, Castelvità, you stop to visit the marvellous limestone caves which are over 5 km long, 1700 m of which are accessible to the public. After your visit to the caves you continue on winding country roads to Ottati and Sant'Angelo a Fasanella where you can go and see the local church of Saint Michael, built inside a cave. Alternatively, from Petina you could climb up to the Alburni's high plateau with its beautiful beech forests, and experience the exhilarating descent towards Sant'Angelo a Fasanella. This will shorten your trip significantly, but the climb up is a really thorough one, reaching almost 1300 m! From Sant'Angelo, a short stretch of road brings you to Corleto Monforte again, from where you return to your agriturismo in Bellosguardo. Tonight's dinner will be based on local specialties, accompanied by the agriturismo's own wine.

Distance : 80/105 km – Altitude gain : 1570m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours
Agriturismo in Bellosguardo - HB

Day 4 From Bellosguardo to Marina di Camerota

Today's trip takes you from the inland of the Cilento to the coast again. You leave Bellosguardo in the morning and after a few km you reach the village of Roscigno, where the old centre – *Roscigno Vecchia*, the 'Pompeii of the 19th century' – was abandoned at the beginning of the 20th century and has since been preserved unchanged. After visiting the abandoned village and its tiny crafts museum you pass over the bridge high above the Sammaro Gorge and arrive at Sacco, located directly beneath several high limestone cliffs. From Sacco you start climbing up into the Monte Cervati mountain range, the very heart of the Cilento. You follow quiet roads through cultivated fields and wild forests, often without meeting any traffic for long stretches. From Piaggine you climb up to the Croce di Pruno plateau situated at 1200 m.a.s.l. You then launch yourselves into the exhilarating descent that takes you first to the isolated village of Rofrano and then to the medieval hamlet of Laurito. From here you will follow the old '*strada statale*' running from north to south through the whole of the Cilento, in the direction of Montano Antilia and Futani. This well-paved road is now almost completely free of traffic, ideal for cycling. After arriving at Futani you can enjoy a long and winding descent towards the coast, passing through several small villages, until you arrive at San Severino. Alternatively you can head straight from Montano Antilia to San Severino, passing through the Mingardo River valley. From San Severino you pass by another, this time smaller, abandoned hamlet standing in a marvellous scenic location above a deep canyon. For a short stretch of road you now follow the Mingardo River through its gorge, before turning away from it and climbing up the long winding road to the villages of Licusati and Camerota. From this road you can admire stupendous views of the Mingardo Valley. From Camerota you then enjoy an exhilarating descent into the fishing village of Marina di Camerota, your base for the next two days.

Distance : 88/101 km – Altitude gain : 1730 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours
Hotel in Marina di Camerota – HB



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Day 5 Roundtrip of Monte Bulgheria and the Gulf of Policastro

After an early breakfast you start your next day with a wonderful stretch uphill, along the southern coast of the Cilento. During this first scenic climb you enjoy an unparalleled view of one of the most unspoilt stretches of coastline in southern Italy. After passing through the hamlet of Lentiscosa, you have a short rest in the charming village of San Giovanni a Piro, beautifully located with spectacular views of the Gulf of Policastro. You then head for the coast again, whizzing down to the fishing village of Scario with its little port, and then on to the town of Policastro Bussentino. From Policastro you have the choice between climbing straight up to Morigerati, or continuing to follow the coastal road to Sapri, situated on the border between the Cilento and Basilicata regions. After a short pause on the beach you start climbing up the mountains behind the town towards Torraca and Casaletto Spartano, during which you are rewarded with wonderful views of the Gulf of Policastro. This is one of the wildest and best-preserved areas in the Cilento, crossed by deep gorges and covered by ample forests, amongst which are some of the Cilento's last preserved cork oak groves. You then cycle on to Morigerati and Sicili, after which you descend into the valley of the impressive Bussento River. From the valley floor you climb up a long and winding road to the village of Torre Orsaia, and then to Roccagloriosa, where you stop for a stroll through the nicely-preserved medieval centre and a cold drink at the bar in the village square. From here you start descending slowly towards the coast again, passing underneath the northern slopes of Monte Bulgheria through the villages of Celle di Bulgheria and Poderia. Shortly after passing this last village you arrive again at the gorge of the Mingardo River. This time round you don't climb up to Licusati, but continue along the river to Palinuro, and then along the spectacular coast to Marina di Camerota. After freshening up in the hotel you can go for an evening's stroll and a pre-dinner 'aperitivo', or why not an after-dinner 'gelato' in the delightful village square?

Distance : 86 / 118 km – Altitude gain : 1350 / 1940m - Cycling time (no breaks included): 5 / 7 hours

Hotel in Marina di Camerota - HB

Day 6 From Marina di Camerota to Casalvelino

Today's relatively easy stage takes you from Marina di Camerota to Casalvelino, cycling through the hilly country close to the coast, through olive groves and chestnut forests. You can start by climbing up to Camerota, and then past Licusati, to enjoy the thrill of the fast descent to San Severino, full of hairpin bends, before cycling to Palinuro. Alternatively, you could set off on the easy way on the beautiful road, along the coast, hemmed in between the sea and steep rock cliffs, in the direction of the headland of Capo Palinuro. From here the road goes to the medieval hilltop village of Pisciotta, dominated by the enormous trees in its olive groves. This village is well worth a short visit. After leaving you turn inland again and start climbing up, first to the hamlets of Rodio and Mandia, immersed in the lush mountain countryside. You then start descending towards Santa Barbara and Ceraso. The latter village, with its marvellously preserved medieval centre, is an ideal spot to have your lunch at. From Ceraso you head uphill again towards Vallo della Lucania, the largest town in this part of the Cilento. You can make a short detour to visit the splendid hamlet of Novi Velia, located right under the imposing mass of Monte Gelbison. On top of this mountain is the Maria Sanctuary, which can be reached by climbing a long winding road – only for real athletes though, as it is a long and hard 13 km and no less than 1000 m in altitude to get up there! After Vallo della Lucania you continue to Pattano, with its little early 10th-century abbey, and to Castelnuovo Cilento. From here it is all downhill to Castellamare di Velia, where you have the opportunity to visit the Greek city 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 are the celebrated 'Porta Rosa' (Pink Gate), one of the first examples of the use of the vault in Greek architecture. After your visit you continue on flat roads,



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through the Alento River plain, to your agriturismo at Casalvelino, for a hot shower and some relaxation in the evening.

Distance : 75/92 km – Altitude gain : 1070/1570m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 4/5 hours

Hotel in Casalvelino - HB

Day 7 Roundtrip of Monte Stella

Today you explore the small back roads connecting the many hamlets on the slopes of Monte Stella. From your agriturismo in Casalvelino you head inland, and, shortly after, start climbing up to Acquavella. From there on you climb and descend continuously through the wooded hill country, first to Stella Cilento, and then to Omignano. Here you'll stop for a short break to fill up your water bottles, and you'll take your time to drink a cup of coffee at a local bar. You then have the opportunity of climbing up to the very top of Monte Stella, looking out over most of the Cilento region, which will add another 13 km and 650 metres of altitude gain to your day's trip! Or you can continue straight to the village of Sessa Cilento, where you start descending into the valley of the Alento River, on the inland side of Monte Stella. Following the river valley you arrive at the hamlets of Lustra and Rocca Cilento. You then turn west towards the coast and start heading for the little town of Castellabate, passing by Mercato Cilento and Matonti. From here you can enjoy an enchanting panorama of the Cilento coast, with the promontories of Punta Tresino and Punta Licosa in front of you. Alternatively, you can head directly from Sessa Cilento to Mercato Cilento and Matonti. You will arrive at Castellabate, beautifully located on a hill high above the coast, in time for lunch. After visiting the delightful medieval centre of the town, dominated by its castle, you then continue along the south-western slopes of Monte Stella. You first climb slightly up to Perdifumo, and then continue up and down to Serramezzana and San Mauro Cilento. The last stretch of road, in the foothills of Monte Stella, takes you through the splendid medieval hamlets of Galdo and Celso to Pollica, where you enjoy an exhilarating descent towards the fishing village of Pioppi, known as the second home of the American professor Ancel Keys, father of the so-called Mediterranean Diet. From Pioppi you then follow the coastal road back to Marina di Casalvelino and your agriturismo.

Distance : 74/98 km – Altitude gain : 1550/2300 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours

Hotel in Casalvelino - HB



Day 8 From Casalvelino to Paestum

Your final day's trip takes you along the coast from Casalvelino to Paestum. This will be a relatively short and easy ride, giving you the opportunity to relax and enjoy your last day on the Cilento roads. You first pass through the seaside village of Pioppi again, and then arrive at Acciaroli. Here, back in 1952, Ernest Hemingway spent



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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 an interesting tale or two. In any case you’ll have a short break for a quick cup of coffee or cappuccino. After Acciaroli you will pass through Agnone, before climbing up the modest incline of the ‘*Ripe Rosse*’, or Red Rocks. From here it is downhill to Case del Conte and Ogliastro Marina. You now pass beneath the village of Castellabate and continue in the direction of Agropoli. Following small country roads you arrive at the town’s port. The historical centre, located on steep limestone crags above the port, is well worth a visit. From Agropoli, a few flat km take you to Paestum again. Perhaps it is a good idea to stop at a buffalo farm along the way to have lunch on its premises, tasting genuine fresh buffalo mozzarella. After arriving at your hotel, you can freshen up and spend the afternoon relaxing in the hotel’s garden, or head for the beach. Those interested can visit the museum of the archaeological site, exploring its collections of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculpture. Not to miss is the so-called ‘*Tomba del Tuffatore*’ (Diver’s Tomb), a rare example of Greek funeral painting. In the evening you all have dinner together in the hotel.

Distance : 55 km – Altitude gain : 600 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 3 hours

Hotel in Paestum – HB

Day 9 End of the tour

The tour ends in Paestum after breakfast today. A short private transfer takes you to the local train station, where you can easily find trains to Salerno and 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 which 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.

Nights 2 & 3: These nights are spent in a wonderfully located agriturismo, situated near the village of Bellosguardo in the Alburni foothills. Breakfast and dinner are based on local specialties.

Nights 4 & 5: The next two nights you stay in a nice 3-star hotel in the fishing village of Marina di Camerota, right next to the old village centre. The hotel is within easy walking distance of some nice beaches.

Nights 6 & 7: These nights are spent in a very nice agriturismo in Casalvelino, offering a taste of peaceful country life.

Night 8: The last night is spent again in the hotel at Paestum.

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

Moderate to hard (3/4): Moderate to hard rides (by road cycling standards), inevitably with several climbs, some of which can be quite long and strenuous. 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: Experience of road cycling and a 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, 2 nights Bellosguardo, 2 nights Marina di Camerota, 2 nights Casalvelino in good *** hotels and agriturismos
- Meals: 8 breakfasts, 8 dinners
- 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
- 24/7 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 9. 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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