



Cilento National Park

Coastal Cycling

Cycling along the Coast of the Sirens: explore ancient Greek Temples and enjoy the best of authentic southern Italy



TRIP NOTES 2023

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****GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy****



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 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: the great city of Naples, beautiful countryside, Roman ruins, small islands and stretches of spectacular coast, like the famous 'Costiera Amalfitana' with its towering cliffs and picturesque coves.

But Campania's real secret is located south of Salerno, and immediately south of the wonderful Greek temples of Paestum. Here the coastline bulges out into an expanse of mountainous landmass known as the Cilento, now a National Park with World Heritage listing. The Cilento coast is fairly rocky territory, with the crystalline sea lapping at the shore. There is a wild kind of beauty here; rocky ridges set between small picturesque inlets and richly scented pinewoods backing onto wide sandy beaches. Aleppo pines loom over the multicoloured undergrowth of myrtle and cactuses; whilst huge, centuries-old olive trees grow right down to the shore. Inland the Cilento is largely undisturbed by the 21st century and you can enjoy visiting medieval and quaint fishing villages where the traditional way of life is still evident.

This tour gives you the opportunity to discover the quiet, peaceful Cilento National Park. You will start from the plain of Paestum, known for its amazing Greek temples, and a good place to start cycling through 'flat-ish' terrain. Then you gradually make your way south towards the little fishing village of Marina di Camerota in the far south of the Cilento. You'll cycle along the coast, sampling dreamy coastal scenery, wild mountain valleys and deep gorges, and attractive countryside with vineyards and olive groves.

Here in the Cilento National Park you pass world-famous cultural sites, listed as World Heritage by UNESCO, such as Velia and Paestum, and visit some of the nicest medieval villages in the area, both along the coast and slightly inland, where the traditional way of life is still evident. All these attractions are connected 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.

On this amazing cycling adventure you will not only see for yourselves that the Amalfi Coast has become Italy's most famous coastline with good reason, but you will discover an entirely new and little known, yet equally beautiful part of Italy: the Cilento National Park. It will become clear that it only takes a little effort to get 'off the beaten track', finding yourselves surrounded by nature just a few hundred metres from the crowds. You'll discover a real cycling paradise!



Please note: this is a moderate tour which is suitable for all those who have some experience of 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)

N.B. If you arrive one day earlier you have the chance 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 daytrip to Pompeii. 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).

Day 1 – Arrival in Paestum

After arriving in Paestum, you are being picked up from the station and brought to the hotel, just outside the ancient city walls, just a few metres from the Greek temples. Depending on your arrival time, you could already go for a visit to the archaeological site, dating back to the 6th century BC (UNESCO World Heritage!), where you will admire not only the temples, but also several other monuments. In the late afternoon you will meet your tour guide and the rest of the group for a short introductory briefing on the tour, after which we can go for a short trip to test our bicycles. At night we will have a great dinner on the premises of the hotel.

Accommodation: Hotel in Paestum - HB

Day 2 – Over the plain and through the foothills of Paestum

Our first trip takes us through the ancient territory of the Greek town of Paestum. It's a relaxed ride through the plain, but you could opt for a longer and harder option that takes you to some nice medieval hamlets in the foothills and offers some amazing views. The first part of the ride takes us along the Greek town walls of Paestum and its world-famous Doric temples. Then we continue through the plain of the Sele River, taking in several other interesting sites. Lunch can be taken at a local buffalo farm where we can taste delicious, genuine, fresh mozzarella. The cycling trip will then take us past the 'Capo di Fiume' karst springs, to the villages of Giugnano and Cicerale (optional) and back down again to our hotel. It is possible to opt out for the afternoon ride to dedicate more time to visit the temples and the museum of Paestum. Here you will admire not only the three temples, but also other monuments including the amphitheatre, the 'Heroon' tomb, several Greek and Roman houses and one of the town's impressive gates. In the local museum you can see the exemplary collection of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculpture. Absolutely not to miss is the so-called 'Tomba del Tuffatore' (Diver's Tomb), a rare example of Greek funeral painting. Dinner is on the premises of the hotel tonight. After dinner we can opt to make another short stroll past the temples and perhaps grab a gelato.

Accommodation: Hotel in Paestum – HB

Distance: 33/65,5 km. – Cycling time: 3/5,5 h.



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Day 3 – From Paestum to Casalvelino through Castellabate and Acciaroli

Today we leave the Paestum plain for a first taste of the real Cilento. Our ride today takes us along quiet roads through fragrant Mediterranean *maquis* and shady olive groves, up into the coastal hills above the town of Agropoli, through some dreamy medieval hamlets, and down again to the coastal villages of Santa Maria and San Marco di Castellabate. From here we continue along the coast in a southern direction. This is definitely one of the finest coastal rides in Italy, alternating wonderful views with charming seaside villages. We cycle past the headland of Punta Licosa, named after the nymph Leucosia, and then climb the 'red hills'. After a flattish section we may then stop for a drink in Acciaroli, where, back in 1952, Ernest Hemingway 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 you an interesting tale or two.

By lunch time we reach Ogliastro Marina, on the peninsula of Licosa, famous for its Aleppo Pines. Here we can 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 further inland again, we descend to the delightful little fishing village of Pioppi. 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 of the American professor Ancel Keys, father of the so-called Mediterranean Diet. A last short stretch brings us to Casalvelino Marina, where we will stay in a beautiful agriturismo for the next two nights. Tonight we'll indulge in local specialties: the dinner we'll have is completely based on the agriturismo's own produce, prepared according to the best recipes.

Accommodation: Agriturismo in Casalvelino - HB

Distance: 54,5 km. – Cycling time: 5 h.

Day 4 – Around Monte Stella: roundtrip from Casalvelino

Today's trip starts with a long and winding climb up the southern slopes of Monte Stella, to the beautifully located old village of Acquavella, through olive groves and vineyards. The road continues uphill and, past the village of Stella Cilento, we reach Omignano. Once we have reached this village, the route becomes easier, from here we'll start the 'Ring of Monte Stella', a very panoramic tour with fantastic views in all directions, all around the 'Mountain of the Sea'. This circuit touches several charming villages at more or less the same altitude (a transfer to either Stella Cilento or Omignano can be arranged). The easy road now passes through chestnut forests, opening up now and then to wonderful views over the inland Cilento, reaching as far as the Alburni and Cervati mountain ranges. Once we reach the northern edge of Mt. Stella, views open up towards the Amalfi Coast and Capri. On clear days the view stretches even as far as the island of Stromboli in Sicily! Part of the tour goes through open landscapes, another part through the chestnut forests. We pass a number of nice medieval villages: Celso, Galdo, San Mauro, Stella Cilento, all worth a short stop. Their honest simplicity and quiet peace is best savoured from the local bar, with an Italian coffee at hand. At the end of the day we descend towards Pollica, and then along the coast back to Casalvelino. Or you can opt for a slightly longer route that takes you down to the fishing village of Acciaroli again, for a nice 'aperitivo' at the harbour, before doing the beautiful final stretch back to Casalvelino. After arriving here we can make a stop at the beach for a well-deserved relaxing swim. Another great dinner awaits us on the premises of our beautiful agriturismo.

Accommodation: Agriturismo in Casalvelino - HB

Distance: 65 km. – Cycling time: 5,5 h.

Day 5 – From Casalvelino to the mythical Cape Palinuro

Today is a relatively easy day, which will bring us along the panoramic coastal road to the southern part of the Cilento. The first few km. are like a warm-up ride through the coastal plain of the Alento River. Soon we reach 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 our ride, which now starts to go uphill, to reach the village of Ascea. The road now passes through fragrant



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Mediterranean maquis and centuries-old olive groves, all the while offering fantastic views over the sea. At about lunchtime we reach the medieval hilltop village of Pisciotta. Here we will enjoy a great lunch, overlooking the Mediterranean below. Luckily the ride after lunch is mostly downhill. Halfway through the afternoon we reach 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 in the Cilento National Park. Its unique topography, made up of dazzlingly high rock cliffs full of sea grottos, amongst which is the stunning 'Grotta Azzurra', makes for a wonderful sight. We cycle to the little village of Palinuro and stop at the tiny port.

Those who feel like it can make a short boat tour of the cape, visiting the caves. Others can have a drink or go for a swim at the beautiful little beach. We then cycle up the last few km to our stunningly located hotel, on top of the cliffs: from the terrace of your room you'll be , overlooking the whole south – where you'll be cycling tomorrow. We dine on the premises of the hotel tonight, a superb spot !

Accommodation: Hotel in Palinuro – HB

Distance: 40 km. – Cycling time: 3-4 h.

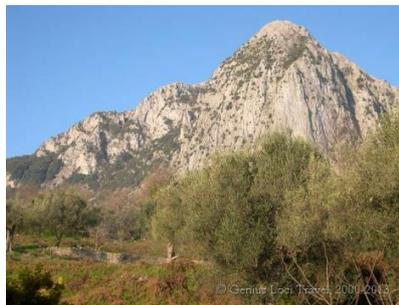
Day 6 – Marina di Camerota and Monte Bulgheria roundtrip

After an early breakfast, we start our cycling day with a wonderful stretch along the southern coast of the Cilento National Park. We arrive in the lovely coastal town of Marina di Camerota, where we can have a short biscuit stop. And then we start climbing! During this very scenic climb you'll enjoy an unparalleled view of one of the most unspoilt stretches of coastline in southern Italy, the 'Cosa degli Infreschi', one of the most unspoilt stretch of coastline in southern Italy. We pass through the little hamlet of Lentiscosa, and continue to the amazingly located village of San Giovanni a Piro, beautifully located with spectacular views of the Gulf of Policastro on the one side and the impressive sheer cliffs of the mountain on the other. Here we can have lunch, either a picnic lunch at one of the most stunning places you've ever been to, or in a cosy little restaurant.

We then continue the tour all around the impressive Mt. Bulgheria. First with a short downhill section, and then 'levelish' through the villages of Bosco and Acquavena, keeping the impressive limestone crags of Monte Bulgheria to your left. After reaching the valley of the Mingardo River you can continue for a short visit to the charming village of Roccagloriosa, nestled on a rocky hill high above the valley floor. After a stroll and perhaps a drink in the village square, we continue downhill, alongside the river, towards the entrance of the impressive Mingardo canyon, dominated by the abandoned medieval village of San Severino. Through the Mingardo canyon we return to our hotel at Cape Palinuro.

Accommodation: Hotel in Palinuro – HB

Distance: 52,5 km. – Cycling time: 5 h.



Day 7 – Departure from Cilento (on to the Amalfi coast?)

Today you can sleep in for a bit and enjoy the scenery. After a leisurely breakfast you are brought to the train station from where you can take the train to Naples, Rome or to Salerno, the gateway to the Amalfi Coast. Those who have booked the Amalfi extension continue their tour from here. Those who booked an extension can enjoy some more stunning beach scenery, discovering the many isolated beaches either on foot or by boat.



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

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

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'll be staying.

Nights 1 & 2: The first two nights are spent in a nice 3-star hotel, just outside the archaeological site of Paestum. The hotel has its own beautiful garden, with swimming pool and is within walking distance of the Greek temples, as well as the beach.

Nights 3 & 4: These nights are spent in an agriturismo 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.

Nights 5 & 6: The last two nights you stay in Palinuro, in a beautiful 4-star hotel located, either right on the beach, or in an awesome position, right on top of the cliffs of Capo Palinuro, above the small beach of Buondormire, considered one of the most beautiful in the whole Cilento.

INCLUDED

- Private English-speaking tour leader for 7 days
- Professional guiding service for each activity
- Accommodation in good ***/**** hotels and agriturismos: 2 nights Paestum, 2 nights Casalvelino, 2 nights Palinuro
- Meals: 6 breakfasts, 5 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
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Items of personal nature
- Bicycle rental (road racing bicycles available on request)



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LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate (3): Mostly moderate rides but inevitably with several climbs, only a 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 of 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 even in hot dry weather conditions.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in PAESTUM, which can easily be reached by train from either Naples or Salerno. A private transfer from the train station to your hotel is included. A group transfer from Naples (airport) or Salerno can be organised in the late afternoon. 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 in PALINURO. A short transfer brings you to the train station. A group transfer to Salerno or Naples can be arranged.

TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to extend your tour with a few days cycling along the beautiful Costiera Amalfitana.



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