



Independent cycling tour (BCILC69)

Paestum & the coast of the Cilento National Park

*Cycling from the Greek temples of Paestum along the beautiful
coast and into the heartland of the Cilento National Park*



TRIP NOTES 2024

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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 it became known as 'Campania Felix', or the Happy Land. When travelling through this 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 tour brings you all along the coast from Paestum to the Gulf of Policastro, but you'll also enjoy some bits of the 'real' rural Cilento, made of olive groves and ancient villages. Inland the Cilento is largely undisturbed by the 21st century and you will encounter few other tourists along your way. You will cycle along 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 through attractive countryside, with vineyards and olive groves.

*The longer version of this tour also brings you into the real **'Heart of the Cilento'**, from ancient Paestum up to Monte Stella, from Pisciotta inland towards the medieval villages of Ceraso and Rodio, and from the pristine southern Cilento coast around the impressive Bulgheria Mountain.*

During the whole tour you will stay close to the coast, so you'll have many occasions to alternate the cycling with a swim or relax on an empty beach. You will cycle past the archaeological site of Paestum on your way to a genuine mozzarella farm, and climb up to some nice viewpoints on the coastal plain. Further on you will cycle around Monte Stella, dotted with several typical medieval hamlets, and continue along the coast towards the tiny fishing villages of Acciaroli and Pioppi to the Greek site of Velia. From here the coastal route goes a bit higher up, passing through the charming medieval towns of Ascea and Pisciotta, before descending to the sea close to Cape Palinuro again.

The last part of your route takes you along the stunning coast to one of the pearls of the southern coast, Marina di Camerota. A great panoramic ride (optional) along the lower slopes of the Bulgheria Mountain – and perhaps a last swim on one of the wonderful beaches is the superb ending to this great cycling tour.



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



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Paestum (Capaccio)

After arriving at the Paestum train station you will be brought to your hotel near the world famous Temples of Paestum. Your bicycles will be waiting for you at the hotel. If you want you can already make a first ride, of course past the temples and around the Greek city walls, or down to the beach for a quick swim. In case you have arrived early you can visit the temples already, leaving more time for a longer trip tomorrow. In the evening you enjoy a nice dinner in a local restaurant in Paestum.

Hotel*** - Paestum

Distance: 6,5 km. – Cycling time: 0,5 h. – Ascent & descent: +/- 30 m.

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

Your first trip takes you on a ride through the ancient territory of the Greek town of Paestum. You can opt for a relaxed ride through the plain, or a longer and harder one taking you to some nice medieval hamlets in the foothills and offering some amazing views. Before setting off you can visit the temples and the museum of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Paestum and its world-famous Doric temples. 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 towns' impressive gates. In the local museum you can see the exemplary collection of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculptures. Absolutely not to miss is the so-called 'Tomba del Tuffatore' (Diver's Tomb), a rare example of Greek funeral painting. Lunch can be taken at a local buffalo farm where you can taste delicious and genuine fresh mozzarella. Your cycling trip will take you through the plain to the Sele River and past the 'Capo di Fiume' karst springs to the villages of Giugnano and Cicerale (optional) and back down again to your hotel.

Hotel*** - Paestum

Distance: 55/70 km – Cycling time: 3,5/5,5 h. – Ascent & descent: +/- 150 m. / + 760 m./- 750 m.

Day 3 – From Paestum to San Marco di Castellabate

Today you will leave the Paestum plain for a first taste of the real Cilento. Your trip takes you on 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 village of San Marco di Castellabate. From your hotel you head for the villages of Prignano and Torchiara, beautifully situated on the lush green slopes overlooking the Cilento coast. You then continue to the villages of Laureana and Vatolla where a visit of the 16th-century Palazzo Vargas is a must. A short last climb from here brings you to Mercato Cilento. From here it will all be downhill, taking you first to Perdifumo, where you can take your time for a stroll or pause to fill up your water bottles and observe the peaceful village life, and then, along a road with wonderful views to the spectacular village of Castellabate. After a short visit you'll cycle down to road to the seaside resort of Santa Maria di Castellabate. A short stretch of road along the coast brings you to San Marco di Castellabate, renowned for its tiny port where able craftsmen continue a centuries-old tradition of building wooden boats by hand. After arriving at your hotel and settling in, you can either cycle or walk the short path along the coast to the wonderful little islet of Leucosia, situated in the marine reserve of Punta Licosa, or take a stroll through the centre of town for a pre-dinner aperitif at one of the local bars. In case you want an easier day we proposal a nice coastal route through Agropoli, with time to spend there, and perhaps on the nice little beach of Trentova. After arriving at your hotel, it is only a short walk down to the beach for a well-deserved relaxing swim.

Hotel*** - San Marco di Castellabate

Distance: 45/50 km – Cycling time: 3,5-4,5 h. – Ascent & descent: +/- 550 m. / +/- 600 m.

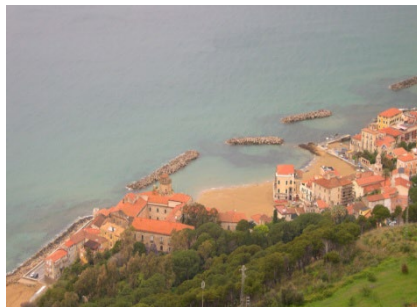


Day 4 - Around Monte Stella: round trip from San Marco di Castellabate

Today's trip starts with a long and winding climb up to the beautifully located town of Castellabate, once a fortified stronghold offering refuge to the local peasants. Here you can take some time to rest and visit the medieval castle, from which you enjoy a splendid view of the coastal hamlets of San Marco and Santa Maria. You then climb further up to Perdifumo and Mercato Cilento. From here you have two options: either you pass on the western side of the mountain, or you opt for a complete 'circumnavigation' of Monte Stella. Either way, along the route view reaches as far as the Amalfi Coast and Capri, while on clear days it may even be possible to see all the way to Sicily! During this part of your trip you will pass through some exquisite medieval hamlets, such as Perdifumo, Serramezzana, Celso, Galdo, and San Mauro Cilento. Each of them merits a stopover to sample their honest simplicity and quiet peace, best savoured sat at the local bar sipping an Italian coffee. The easy roads here bring you through chestnut forests, opening up now and then to wonderful views of the inland Cilento, reaching as far as the Alburni and Cervati mountain ranges. At the end of the day, you have the choice of turning back again to San Marco by Castellabate, or opt for a slightly longer route that takes you down to the fishing village of Agnone and then along the coast to San Marco.

Hotel*** - San Marco di Castellabate

Distance: 50/70 km. - Cycling time: 4-5,5 h. - Ascent & descent: +/- 600 m. / +/- 760 m.



Day 5 – From San Marco di Castellabate to Pisciotta

After leaving San Marco you will head south on the coastal road towards the Alento river plain. A short climb takes you up through Mediterranean maquis and pine woods to the 'Ripe Rosse' or Red Rocks. You then whizz down to the coastal hamlet of 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. In any case Acciaroli fully merits a stop and a quiet stroll around its little port and town centre. Slightly further along the coast you pass through the fishing village of Pioppi, another delightful little town. Here you will find a 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. After visiting the museum, you have time for a quick coffee at the seafront before cycling on. The coastal road then takes you to Casalvelino Marina, and through the plain of the Alento River to the Greek and Roman site of Velia, home to the philosophers Zenon and Parmenides, and cradle of one of Europe's most ancient schools of medicine. You can leave your bikes at the entrance and explore the amazing site. Alternatively, you can visit the site during tomorrow's roundtrip and now opt for a swim at the beautiful sandy beach, before leaving the coast and heading inland. From Velia you'll have a last steep climb to go: up to the old village of Ascea, dominating the coast from above. From Ascea you'll follow a stunning coastal route the hilltop village of Pisciotta, one of the best-preserved medieval villages of the area, where you settle for the night. In case you want to end your tour on the coast, you can opt to ride on a few km. – all downhill- to Palinuro.

Hotel*** - Pisciotta

Distance: 50 km. - Cycling time: 4,5 h. - Ascent & descent: + 500 m./- 450 m.



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Day 6 - Roundtrip from Pisciotta

During today's roundtrip you will discover the largely unspoiled and often rough landscape between Ceraso, Pisciotta and Ascea. Here few tourists ever set foot, even during the busy summer season, and you are certain to have the quiet roads and peaceful villages all to yourself. From Pisciotta you return in a northern direction, first to Ascea and then down in the direction of Velia. If you didn't visit the archaeological site the day before now is the time to explore it. Amongst its remains one finds the celebrated 'Porta Rosa', one of the first examples of the use of the vault in Greek architecture.

Other monuments worth exploring are the port, the Greek and Roman baths and the agora. The town's acropolis in medieval times has been reused as a local stronghold and preserves a magnificent medieval bastion. From Velia you will then head inland to the medieval hamlet of Ceraso with its characteristic 'palazzi' a little further inland. After visiting Ceraso – maybe you can take some time to have a cappuccino at the local bar – you continue through shady oak and chestnut forests to the tiny, wonderfully located villages of Santa Barbara, Mandia and Rodio high above the Cilento coast. From Rodio you start descending back towards the coast, passing through groves of the enormous local olive trees, with views reaching from Monte Stella to the north and Capo Palinuro to the south. If you still feel fit you might go for a short extra loop to Marina di Pisciotta (and back up! – a 8/10 km. roundtrip), otherwise you can ride directly back to Pisciotta and enjoy in drink in the village.

Hotel*** - Pisciotta

Distance: 50/60 km – Cycling time: 3,5-4,5 h. – Ascent & descent: +/- 600 m. / +/- 720 m.



Day 7 – From Pisciotta along Cape Palinuro to the southern Coast

Today is a relatively easy day, which will bring you along the panoramic coastal road to the southern part of the Cilento. The first few km. are like a warm-up ride with a gentle downhill bias all the way to the mythical 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. You can cycle all the way through the village of Palinuro – make a scenic loop over the top of the cape and stop at the tiny port. Those who feel like it can make a short boat tour of the cape here, visiting the caves. Or you can opt to have a drink or go for a swim at the beautiful little beach. Then you'll cycle on in eastern direction, a wonderful stretch along the southern coast of the Cilento National Park. For those who still have some energy there is the option to take one of the most scenic roads of the area, a challenging climb up to Lentiscosa. Through the nice village of Camerota, worth a visit, if alone for its castle and medieval town centre, you then cycle back down to Marina. Upon arrival in the lovely coastal town of Marina di Camerota, you can have a drink at the harbour and then settle in your hotel. At night you can go out for dinner in one of the nice (fish) restaurants.

B&B - Marina di Camerota

Distance: 35/50 km. – Cycling time: 2,5-4 h. – Ascent & descent: + 200 m./- 300 m. / + 500 m./- 600 m.



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Day 8 - Marina di Camerota and Monte Bulgheria roundtrip

After an early breakfast, you can start your cycling day with a short level stretch along the coast. But then you will have to 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 'Costa degli Infreschi', one of the most unspoilt stretch of coastline in southern Italy. You pass through the little hamlet of Lentiscosa, and continue to the amazingly located village of San Giovanni a Piro.

This village is 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. Before entering the village you first cycle up to Ciolandra, one of the most beautiful viewpoints of the whole Cilento, perhaps one of the most stunning places you've ever been to! Or you can opt to cycle on to the small village and have lunch in a cosy little restaurant. Then you 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. An optional detour (about 6 km.) brings you to 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, you then continue to Celle di Bulgheria, after which you'll reach the upper entrance of the impressive Mingardo canyon, dominated by the abandoned medieval village of San Severino. Before cycling down through the canyon back to the coast you must pay a short visit to this ghost town! Through the Mingardo canyon you'll then return to the coast and cycle back the coastal route to your hotel.

B&B - Marina di Camerota

Distance: 50 km. – Cycling time: 4 h. – Ascent & descent: + 650 m./- 600 m.

Day 9 – Departure

The tour ends in Marina di Camerota after breakfast today.

A private transfer (included) takes you to the train station, from where you travel back to Naples or Salerno.

TOUR VARIATIONS

SHORTER VERSIONS

A shorter version of this tour of 6 days is available. It is possible to turn this tour into a linear coastal ride, omitting the 3 inland 'loops'. This way you can turn the tour into a 5 or 6-day tour (we recommend to always spend 2 nights in Paestum). Please check the section 'Included' below.

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to include extra nights in any of the accommodations 'en route'. Extra cycling and/or sightseeing options can be provided! It is particularly recommended to add an extra night in Marina di Camerota, where you can relax a bit on one of Italy's most beautiful beaches, or go for a boat ride or walk there.

As well is it possible to extend your tour with a few days in the Heart of the Cilento or at Salerno, along the beautiful *Costiera Amalfitana* or in Naples. Details & prices on request.



TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

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

Dinner is included on day 1 in a local restaurant in Paestum. 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.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

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

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderately easy (2-3): 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 during the first two days and the last. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on some days.

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

INCLUDED

- 8 nights accommodation – BB
- 2 nights in Hotel*** in Paestum – BB
- 1 dinner in a local restaurant in Paestum on day 1
- 2 (1) nights in Hotel*** in San Marco di Castellabate – BB
- 2 (1) nights in Hotel*** in Pisciotta – BB
- 2 (1) nights in B&B in Marina di Camerota – BB
- Luggage transfer on day 3 & day 5 & day 7 & day 9 (long version)
- Luggage transfer on day 3 & day 4 & day 5 & day 6 (short version)
- Private transfers as specified
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 50.000 scale (or better)
- GPS waypoints & tracks
- 24/7 h assistance

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 (available on request - www.genius-loci.it/tour/rental-bikes)



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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 in MARINA DI CAMEROTA. A short transfer can bring you to the local train station where Salerno and Naples are easily reachable.



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