

Naples and Campania guided walking tour

Naples and Campania mark the beginning of the Italian south, the *mezzogiorno* (the land of the midday sun). The Romans called it Campania Felix or the 'happy lands'. It is a stunningly beautiful area with endless surprises, beautiful scenery and the irrepressible exuberance and hospitality of southern Italy. The tour starts with three nights in Naples, which, with its perfect setting between a sweeping gulf and a smoking volcano and a history unbroken since the ancient Greeks, Naples is a fabulous and fascinating city: crowded, loud and hectic, its vibrant streets burst with life and hold some of the finest art and museums in Italy.

From Naples we head east driving across the plains of Campania to the foothills of the Apennine mountains, near the border with Puglia. Here we'll stay for four nights in a lovely country house within striking distance of the Monti Picentini National Park, where we'll walk, enjoy fine southern cuisine and some of the best wines in the region. After the mountainous interior we'll head south to the Tyrrhenian Coast, staying in a gorgeous village perched on a mountain overlooking the Policastro Gulf, where we stay three nights. Although less than two hours' drive from Amalfi, the town's pretty square, isolated beaches and mountain walking trails remain remarkably free from the crowds that are drawn to its more famous neighbour. For the grand finale of the tour we drive north to the Amalfi Coast, staying in stunning Ravello for the last two nights, a fitting end to this fabulous tour.

The walks:

The walks on this tour are varied and fascinating. We start with a climb up Mt Vesuvius. We then head east into the interior of Campania with walks in the beautiful Monti Picentini National Park and the rolling foothills of the Apennine Range. From here we head down to the Tyrrhenian Coast for spectacular coastal walks in two other National Parks (Pollino and Cilento). The tour finishes with a classic walk from Ravello down to Amalfi. The walks vary from 10 to 14 kilometres, mostly following unsealed country lanes.

The accommodation:

The accommodation is one of the highlights of the tour. In Naples we stay in a 4-star hotel in the centre of the city. In the Apennines, our base is a lovely family-run country house, which is surrounded by gardens and has a swimming pool. On the coast, we spend three nights in a 4-star hotel in the heart of the old town, which also has lovely gardens and a swimming pool. We finish in Ravello staying in a 4-star hotel with views overlooking the Amalfi Coast.

The food:

Food and wine, of course, is one of the highlights of any tour to Italy but particularly on this one. Our first meal in a Michelin-starred restaurant, followed by lunch in a celebrated pizzeria in the heart of the old town. For the second leg of the tour, we stay in the district of Irpinia, which, with its altitude, cool climate and volcanic soils, is one of the premier wine and farming zones in southern Italy. Our stay here includes a visit to one of the more important vineyards and a cooking lesson in our hosts' own kitchen. We finish the tour with the excellent seafood of the Campanian coast.

Inclusions:

- 12 nights accommodation (see the itinerary for details) in excellent boutique hotels
- All breakfast, and all lunches and dinners (wine included) listed in the itinerary
- All land and sea transfers during the tours
- All taxes and service charges at the hotels and restaurants
- All paid admissions during the tour
- 7 guided walks
- Services of a full-time professional tour guide

Naples and Campania guided walking tour itinerary

Day 1:

We meet at our 4-star hotel in the heart of Naples for an aperitif and then walk down to have dinner on the city's famous waterfront at a Michelin-starred with views over Vesuvius and the celebrated gulf. Dinner.

Day 2:

This morning we will be taken on a guided visit into Spaccanoopli and the Spanish Quarter to explore the heart of this extraordinary city, including visits to the cathedral and the chapel of San Gennaro; one of Caravaggio's greatest works and Giuseppe Sanmartino's incredible Vieled Christ. After lunch (pizza of course!) we'll spend the afternoon in Nazionale Archeological Museum, the most important archaeological museum in Europe, bursting with comprehensive collections of Graeco-Roman. The evening is free. Dinner.

Day 3:

This morning we will be taken on a guided visit to Herculaneum, an ancient residential town on the outskirts of Naples that was swallowed up in the same eruption as Pompeii. Smaller but better preserved than Pompeii, Herculaneum is no less fascinating and more manageable for a single visit. After lunch the afternoon is free. You have the option of joining your guide to scale Mt Vesuvius (*3 kms, 2 hours*); visit Pompeii (we can organise guides for this) or chill out and do some shopping back in Naples. Evening free. Dinner.

Day 4:

This morning we leave the bustle of Campania's capital and head east across the fertile plains of Benevello to the rolling foothills of the Appenine Mountains near the regional border with Puglia, along the way stopping at the extravagant Royal Palace in Caserta (the Bourbons' 18th century answer the Palace of Versailles).

After a light lunch, we drive to our base for the next four nights, which is in a lovely country house with extensive gardens, a swimming pool and a celebrated restaurant in the heart of the Taurasi wine growing district, three kilometres from one of the region's best-preserved hill-towns. Dinner at the country house.

Day 5:

Today we drive south to a picturesque mountain town on the edge of the Monti Picentini National Park. A local will guide will accompany us on a loop walk through forests along the well-marked trails of this beautiful range passing a 14th century monastery and the ruins of a Norman castle (*10 kms, 4 hours*). We'll have a picnic lunch along the way.

In the afternoon, we'll stop at our neighbouring town. Sitting on hills above the Ofanto and Calore rivers, it is believed that Hannibal passed by the settlement, losing a number of elephants which became bogged in the river flats. In the Middle Ages, the town was an important bishopric and a seat of learning, becoming known as the Athens of the Irpina. After the plague of 1656, the town's fortunes declined, leaving it something of an enchanting time capsule. After an aperitivo, we'll head back to base for dinner. Lunch and dinner.

Day 6:

Today we explore the fine wines and cuisine of the region. Although virtually unknown outside Italy, Irpinia has been called the 'new Tuscany' for the quality of its wines. Due to volcanic activity, high elevation, strong sunshine and cool nights, this region is tailor-made for making great wine most notably its four different indigenous DOCG certified varieties: Aglianico, Greco di Tufo, Fallanghina, and Fiano di Avellino.

In the morning we will visit one of the region's finest producers, where we'll visit their wonderful cellars, having a degustation of the wines and a light lunch, before returning to our base for a bit of R&R. Later in the afternoon we are introduced to the secrets of the 'Irpina' cuisine via cooking lesson conducted by our hosts in their own restaurant, learning to cook a selection of local specialities such as different types of hand-made pastas; focaccia and grilled meats, accompanied by fine local wines. Lunch and dinner.

Day 7:

This morning we drive to a small village in the heart of the Monti Picentini National Park. The walk follows a marked trail along the valley of the Tusciano River. Along the way passing the ruins of a medieval paper factory and the spectacular peaks of the mountain range, finishing at a small hamlet. We'll have a picnic lunch along the way (*13.5 kms, 4.5 hours*). The afternoon is free. Dinner at our base. Lunch and dinner.

Day 8:

Today we drive south to Campania's spectacular coastline. Along the way, we will stop for a guided tour of an extraordinary World Heritage listed monastery: founded by the Normans in 1086, it has the largest cloisters in the world. After lunch we will continue on to one of Italy's best-kept secrets: a tiny enclave on a hilltop overlooking the sparkling Policastro Gulf, a vibrant and well-preserved town with a long history (its little museum contains more than 50 anchors from ancient Roman and Greek ships that wrecked along its rocky coast). Our base for the next three nights is boutique 4-star hotel with gardens and a swimming pool in the centre of town. The evening is free. Lunch.

Day 9:

This morning we follow an ancient path up into the hills above the town that has connected looping through forest and passing through a number of hamlets until arriving at the peak of Mt San Biagio, which has breathtaking view of the gulf to the west and east over the forests and the mountains of Calabria and the Pollino National Park. After having a picnic lunch, we'll continue along the trail back down to our base (10 kms, 3.5 hours). The rest of the afternoon is free. Lunch.

Day 10:

Today we explore what has been described as the most beautiful coastline in Italy, heading west on a sailing boat to a small village sometimes known as Little Provence because of its colours; the intense smells of the sea combined with that of the wild lavender in the hinterland; its bucolic tranquillity and the fact that artists and writers have made this hidden corner of the Mediterranean their home. Locals, on the other hand, refer to it, tongue in cheek, as the Portofino of the south for its multi-coloured houses, its small port full of yachts and its clutch of fashionable bars and restaurants. Well off the traditional tourist trail, it is a great place to spend a relaxing day.

After a coffee at the port, you will have the option of exploring the town and having a swim or going for a walk above the coast, climbing to a 16th century which has spectacular views back across the gulf to the east and down south across the sea to the Stromboli and the Aeolian Islands (5 kms, 3 hours). After a slow lunch on the waterfront, we'll cross the gulf back to our base. Evening free. Lunch.

Day 11:

This morning we drive north to the spectacular Amalfi Coast, visiting on the way the extraordinary Greek ruins of Paestum. Swallowed up by forests they lay unknown for over two millennia only being discovered in the early 1800s. Their perfect state of preservation and isolated position above the Tyrrhenian Sea add to their impressive grandeur. We will walk to one of Campania's premier mozzarella producers and will have an open-air lunch under a pergola.

Our tour finishes in Ravello, a charming town with a rich history sitting on a natural balcony with breath-taking views of the famous Amalfi Coast. 'Closer to the sky than the seashore', Ravello is pleasingly removed from the busier towns on seashore, a lovely spot to finish our tour. Our accommodation is a 4-star hotel, each room with views across the coast. After arriving, the afternoon is free. Lunch and dinner.

Day 12:

Our finale is a glorious walk from Ravello a longer walk option into the extraordinary Valle delle Ferriere, which wraps through a national park, with towering cliffs, shaded chestnut forests, waterfalls and breathtaking views down over the coast (11 kms, 5 hours). You will be free to explore Amalfi and have lunch and either take a bus back to Amalfi or take the short steep walk back up to Ravello. We will have our final dinner in a lovely restaurant overlooking the twinkling lights of the Amalfi Coast. Dinner.

Day 13:

In the morning you will be transferred back to Naples, an hour's drive from Ravello, which has national and international rail and air connections.