



The Amalfi Coast

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

Deemed by Unesco to be an outstanding example of a Mediterranean landscape, the Amalfi Coast is a beguiling combination of great beauty and gripping drama: coastal mountains plunge into the sea in a stunning vertical scene of precipitous crags, picturesque towns and lush forests.

Among the glittering string of coastal gems, legendary Positano and Amalfi sparkle the brightest, while mountain-top Ravello has the glossy fame of its grandiose villas and Wagnerian connection. Amalfi Coast gateway Sorrento is a handsome and venerable cliff-top resort that has miraculously survived the onslaught of package tourism.

Aside from its sheer beauty, the region is home to some superb restaurants and hotels. It is also one of Italy's top spots for hiking, with well-marked trails providing a great means of getting away from the coastal clamour.

When to Go

- ➔ The Amalfi Coast is strictly seasonal, with the majority of hotels, restaurants and bars pulling down their shutters from late October to Easter.
- ➔ April to June and September to October are less-crowded periods.
- ➔ Neapolitans descend en masse in August, especially at weekends, when restaurants and sunbeds fill up fast.
- ➔ The best time for hiking is spring, when wildflowers are a colourful bonus and the weather is pleasantly temperate, albeit occasionally wet.

SORRENTO

POP 16,500

An unshamed resort, Sorrento is nonetheless a civilised and beautiful town. Even the souvenirs are a cut above the norm, with plenty of fine old shops selling the ceramics, lacework and *intarsio* (marquetry items) that are famously produced here. The main drawback is the lack of a proper beach: the town straddles the cliffs overlooking the water to Naples and Mt Vesuvius.

Sorrento makes a good base for exploring the region's highlights: to the south is the best of the peninsula's unspoilt countryside, to the east is the Amalfi Coast, to the north lie Pompeii and other archaeological sites, and offshore is the fabled island of Capri.

Sights

The centre is compact: all the main sights are within walking distance of Piazza Tasso. Sorrento is a glorious town for an evening *passaggiata* (stroll), the lively streets punctuated with jaw-dropping cliff-top spots to take in the sunset.

Museo Correale

MUSEUM

(☎081 878 18 46; www.museocorreale.it; Via Correale 50; admission €7; ☎9.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun) East of the city centre, this museum is well worth a visit whether you're a clock collector, an archaeological egghead or into embroidery. In addition to the rich assortment of 17th- to 19th-century Neapolitan art and crafts, there are Japanese, Chinese and European ceramics, clocks, furniture and, on the ground floor, Greek and Roman artefacts. The bulk of the collection, along with the 18th-century villa housing it, was donated to the city in the 1920s by aristocratic counts Alfredo and Pompeo Correale. Be sure to wander around the gardens, with their breathtaking coastal views and rare plants and flowers.

Marina Grande

HARBOUR

(Via Marina Grande) The closest thing to a *spiaggia* (beach) is this pleasant sandy stretch at Marina Grande harbour; if you want to just loll in the sun, nearby jetties sport umbrellas and deckchairs. While it's far smaller than the island of Procida in the Bay of Naples, this former fishing district has a glimmer of similarity, with its pastel-coloured houses, brightly painted boats and fishermen mending nets. There are some earthy seafood restaurants serving fish from the morning's catch.

Sedile Dominava

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Via San Cesareo) Incongruously wedged between racks of lemon-themed souvenir merchandise, this 15th-century domed *pala-zzo* (mansion) has exquisite, albeit faded, original frescoes. Crowned by a cupola, the terrace, open to the street on two sides, was originally a meeting point for the town's medieval aristocracy; today it houses a working men's club where local pensioners sit around playing cards.

Centro Storico

AREA

(Corso Italia) The bustling *centro storico* (historic centre) ranges along Corso Italia, a major hub for shops, restaurants and bars. Duck into the side streets and you'll find narrow lanes flanked by traditional green-shuttered buildings, interspersed with the occasional *palazzo*, piazza or church. Souvenir shops, trattorias and some fine old buildings also jostle for space in this tangle of cobbled backstreets.

Duomo

CATHEDRAL

(Corso Italia; ☎8am-12.30pm & 4.30-9pm) To get a feel for Sorrento's history, stroll down Via Pietà from Piazza Tasso and past two medieval palaces en route to the cathedral, with its striking exterior fresco, triple-tiered bell tower, four classical columns and elegant majolica clock. Take note of the striking marble bishop's throne (1573) and the beautiful wooden choir stalls decorated in the local *intarsio* style. The cathedral's original structure dates from the 15th century, but the building has been altered several times, most recently in the early 20th century when the current facade was added.

Museo Bottega della Tarsia Lignea

MUSEUM

(☎081 877 19 42; www.museomuta.it; Via San Nicola 28; adult/reduced €8/5; ☎10am-6.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) Since the 18th century, Sorrento has been famous for its *intarsio* furniture, made with elaborately designed inlaid wood. Some wonderful

BEST AMALFI COAST BEACHES

Baia de Ieranto (p156)

Spiaggia di Fornillo (p159)

Marina di Praia (p163)

Bagni Regina Giovanna (p146)