

welcome to Southern Italy



History & Art

Few parts of Europe would dare compare their cultural riches to those of Italy's Mezzogiorno (land of the midday sun). For millennia at the crossroads of civilisations, southern Italy is a World Heritage overachiever, bursting with superlative art and architecture. Let your imagination run wild among the prehistoric *sassi* (cave dwellings) of Matera, or the Disney-like *trulli* (conical dwellings) of the Valle d'Itria. Channel the past at the Greek temples of Segesta and Paestum, or on the haunted streets of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Compare the Byzantine glitter of Sicily's cathedrals to the darkness of Caravaggio's *Flagellazione* in Naples. Then watch the

region outdo itself with its idiosyncratic baroque. From Caserta's gilded royal palace to the fantastical facades of Lecce and south-eastern Sicily, the south's flood of frescoes, marble and curves will leave you begging for more.

Food, Glorious Food

The lust doesn't stop there. This is the country's culinary soul, home to Italy's best pizza, pasta, mozzarella, vegetables, citrus and seafood. It's like one never-ending feast: bubbling, wood-fired pizza and potent espresso in Naples; long, lazy lunches at vine-framed Pugliese farmhouses; just-caught sardines by lapping waves on a Tyrrhenian island; lavish, luscious pastries in

Volcanic, voluptuous and irrepressibly vivacious, southern Italy is a hypnotic collision of ancient cultures, exotic flavours and hedonistic urges. Welcome to where Europe ends and the rest of the world begins.

(left) Rugged mountains meet the jewel-like sea on the southern coast of Capri (p53)
(below) Spaghetti *alle vongole* (with clams), a Campanian speciality (p238)



DAVID TOWAL/INSON/LOVELLY/PAULETTI/MADES CREDIT ©



JUAN BERNARD ORRILETT/LOVELLY/PAULETTI/MADES CREDIT ©

chintzy Palermo *pasticcerie* (pastry shops). Should you go mushroom hunting in the wilds of Calabria? Taste-test your first red aubergine (eggplant) at an heirloom trattoria in Basilicata? Feast on fresh sea urchin on an Adriatic beach? Or just kick back with a glass of crisp local Falanghina as you debate who has the creamiest buffalo mozzarella – Caserta, Paestum or Foggia? Whatever your choice, be certain that good food and wine will play starring roles in your southern sojourn.

Natural Highs

Mother Nature went into overdrive in the south, creating a thrilling jumble of rugged mountains, fiery volcanoes and glit-

tering coastal grottoes. It's like one giant playground begging to be tackled – at a pace that's fast and furious, or romantic and relaxed. Crank up the heart rate white-water rafting down Calabria's river Lao; scaling Europe's most active volcano, Stromboli; or diving into prehistoric sea caves on Puglia's Promontorio del Gargano. If you need to bring it down a notch, the options are just as enticing, from slow pedalling across Puglia's gentle countryside, or sailing along the Amalfi Coast, to simply stripping down and soaking in Vulcano's healing geothermal mud. The options may be many, but there is one constant – a landscape that is beautiful, diverse and just a little magic.