

Welcome to Southern Italy

Italy's north may have the euros, but the south has the soul. Beautifully sun-bleached, weathered and worn, this is Italy at its most ancient, complex and seductive.

Cultural Riches

For millennia the crossroads of civilisations, southern Italy is littered with the legacies of grand cultures, from the Greeks and Romans to the Saracens, Normans and Spanish. Channel the classics at the Greek temples of Segesta and Paestum, or on the chariot-grooved streets of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Even older are the prehistoric *sassi* (cave dwellings) of Matera, yet another of the south's wonders. Compare the Byzantine glitter of Sicily's cathedrals to the darkness of Caravaggio's *Flagellazione* in Naples, then watch the region outdo itself with some of the country's finest baroque.

Endless Feasting

Italy's south is a never-ending feast: bubbling, wood-fired pizza and potent espresso in Naples; long, lazy lunches at vine-framed Pugliese farmhouses; freshly caught sardines on Tyrrhenian islands; lavish, luscious pastries in chintzy *pasticceria* (pastry shops). 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?

A Warm Benvenuto

You'll rarely be short of a conversation south of Rome. Southern Italians are naturally curious, famously affable, and quick to share their opinion. Family and friends are sacred, and time spent laughing, arguing or gossiping is as integral to southern life as lavish Sunday lunches and long, hot summers. Here, simple questions will quickly turn into earnest conversations, while casual chats can easily transform into budding friendships. So pick up a few local words, polish that smile, and don't be surprised if you head home with a string of new life-long *amici* (friends).

Natural Highs

With rugged mountains, fiery volcanoes and glittering coastal grottoes, southern Italy feels like one giant playground waiting to be tackled. 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, consider slow pedalling across Puglia's gentle countryside, sailing along the Amalfi Coast, or 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.



Why I Love Southern Italy

By Cristian Bonetto, Author

Southern Italy is like the Slow Food of travel. While much of Europe marches to an increasingly homogenised beat, this raffish corner of the continent dances to its own hypnotic tune. Here, melancholy folk songs still fill the air; eyeshadow is applied thick and bright; and hearts are proudly worn on sleeves. Many of my fondest travel memories have been formed here: epic Sunday lunches with new-found friends; hot winds whistling through ancient temples; quiet swims in milky-blue Tyrrhenian waters. I might hail from the north, but my heart belongs to the Mezzogiorno.

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