



# Naples & Campania

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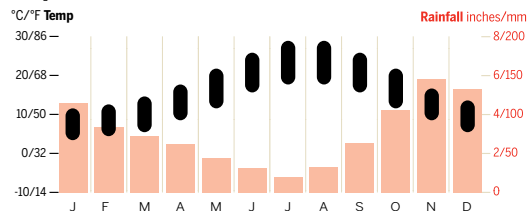
## Why Go?

Campania could be a multi-Academy Award winner, scooping up everything from Best Cinematography to Best Original Screenplay. Strewn with temples, castles and palaces, the region bursts with myths, legends and anecdotes – Icarus plunged to his death in the Campi Flegrei, sirens lured sailors off Sorrento, and Wagner put quill to paper in lofty Ravello.

Campania's cast includes some of Europe's most fabled destinations, from haunting Pompeii and Herculaneum to celebrity-studded Capri and Positano. At its heart thumps bad-boy Naples, a love-it-or-loathe-it sprawl of operatic *palazzi* (mansions) and churches, mouthwatering markets and art-crammed museums. Beyond its hyperactive streets lies a wonderland of lush bay islands, faded fishing villages and wild mountains. Seductive, vivacious and often contradictory – welcome to Italy at its passionate best.

## When to Go

### Naples



**Easter** Follow the faithful at mystical Easter processions in Sorrento and Procida.

**May** Naples celebrates culture with its event-packed Maggio dei Monumenti festival.

**Sep** Hit the coast for warm, languid days without the maddening August crowds.

## NAPLES

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Italy's most misunderstood city is also one of its most intriguing – an exhilarating mess of bombastic baroque interiors, cocky baristas and subterranean ruins. Contradiction is the catchphrase here, a place where anarchy and grit sidle up beside glorious churches, tranquil cloisters and dignified seaside castles. Naples' *centro storico* (historic centre) is a Unesco World Heritage Site, its museums lay claim to some of Europe's finest archaeology and art, and its gilded royal palaces make Rome look positively provincial.

### History

According to legend, traders from Rhodes established the city on the island of Megaris (where Castel dell'Ovo now stands) in about 680 BC. Originally called Parthenope, in honour of the siren whose body had earlier washed up there (she drowned herself after failing to seduce Ulysses), it was eventually incorporated into a new city, Neapolis, founded by Greeks from Cumae (Cuma) in 474 BC. However, within 150 years it was in Roman hands, becoming something of a VIP resort favoured by emperors Pompey, Caesar and Tiberius.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Naples became a duchy, originally under the Byzantines and later as an independent dukedom, until it was captured in 1139 by the Normans and absorbed into the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The Normans, in turn, were replaced by the German Swabians, whose charismatic leader Frederick II injected the city with new institutions, including its university.

The Swabian period came to a violent end with the victory of Charles I of Anjou at the 1266 battle of Benevento. The Angevins did much for Naples, promoting art and culture, building Castel Nuovo and enlarging the port, but they were unable to stop the Spanish Aragon taking the city in 1442. However, Naples continued to prosper. Alfonso I of Aragon, in particular, introduced new laws and encouraged the arts and sciences.

In 1503 Naples was absorbed by Spain, which sent viceroys to rule as virtual dictators. Despite Spain's heavy-handed rule, Naples flourished artistically and acquired much of its splendour. Indeed, it continued to bloom when the Spanish Bourbons re-established Naples as the capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1734. Aside from a

Napoleonic interlude under Joachim Murat (1806–15), the Bourbons remained until they were unseated by Garibaldi and the Kingdom of Italy in 1860.

### Modern Struggles & Achievements

Naples was heavily bombed in WWII, and the effects can still be seen on many monuments around the city. Since the war, Campania's capital has continued to suffer. Endemic corruption and the re-emergence of the Camorra have plagued much of the city's postwar resurrection, reaching a nadir in the years following a severe earthquake in 1980. In 2011 the city's sporadic garbage-disposal crisis flared up again, leading frustrated residents to set fire to uncollected rubbish in the streets.

Despite these tribulations, the winds of change are blowing. In recent years, Naples' young and visionary mayor, Luigi de Magistris, has introduced numerous schemes aimed at making Italy's third-largest city cleaner and greener. Among these is the pedestrianisation of Naples' famous Lungomare (seafront). New ideas and innovation are driving a growing number of youth-run enterprises and businesses, while the city's famous art-themed metro launched another two show-stopping, starchitect-designed stations in 2015.

### Sights

#### Centro Storico

The three east-west *decumani* (main streets) of Naples' *centro storico* follow the original street plan of ancient Neapolis. Most of the major sights are grouped around the busiest two of these classical thoroughfares: 'Spaccanapoli' (consisting of Via Benedetto Croce, Via San Biagio dei Librai and Via Vicaria Vecchia) and Via dei Tribunali. North of Via dei Tribunali, Via della Sapienza, Via Anticaglia and Via Santissimi Apostoli make up the quieter third *decumanus*.

#### **Complesso Monumentale**

**di Santa Chiara**

BASILICA, MONASTERY

(Map p44; ☎081 551 66 73; [www.monastero-disantachiara.eu](http://www.monastero-disantachiara.eu); Via Santa Chiara 49c; basilica free, Complesso Monumentale adult/reduced €6/4.50; ☺basilica 7.30am-1pm & 4.30-8pm, Complesso Monumentale 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2.30pm Sun; 🏠Dante) Vast, Gothic and cleverly deceptive, the mighty **Basilica di Santa Chiara** stands at the heart of this tranquil