

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 and complex.

Cultural Riches

At the crossroads of civilisations for millennia, southern Italy is littered with the detritus of diverse and gilded ages, from Greek and Roman to Saracen, Norman and Spanish. Every carved stone and every frescoed palace tells a story, from fiery Carthaginian invasions and power-hungry kings, to the humble hopes of Roman slaves and gladiators. Here, ancient Greek temples are older than Rome, Byzantine mosaics attest to cosmopolitan encounters and royal palaces outsize Versailles. Southern Italy is home to no less than 13 Unesco World Heritage cultural sites, each laced with tales of victory, failure and timeless humanity.

Endless Feasting

Italy's south is a belt-busting, mouth-watering feast: bubbling, wood-fired pizza and sucker-punch espresso in Naples; long, lazy lunches at vine-framed Pugliese farmhouses; just-caught sardines on a Tyrrhenian island; and lavish pastries in chintzy Palermo *pasticerie* (pastry shops). Should you go mushroom hunting in the wilds of Calabria? Taste-test your first red eggplant (aubergine) 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. One minute you're picking produce at a street market, the next you're in the middle of a feverish discussion about the in-laws or who grows Italy's sweetest *pomodori* (tomatoes) – Sicily or Campania? No one is a stranger for long, and a casual *chiacchiera* (chat) could easily land you at the dining table of your new best friend.

Natural Highs

Rugged mountains, fiery volcanoes and glittering coastal grottoes – southern Italy feels like one giant playground waiting to be tackled. Crank up the heart rate 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 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 ethereal.



Why I Love Southern Italy

By Cristian Bonetto, Writer

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. 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 to the sound of Pino Daniele; 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.

For more about our writers, see page 296.