



# Naples & Campania

## Includes ➔

Naples .....	653
Capri .....	675
Herculaneum (Ercolano) .....	686
Pompeii .....	691
Sorrento .....	698
Amalfi .....	702
Positano .....	705

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Casa Mele (p707)
- ➔ Da Salvatore (p711)
- ➔ La Cantina del Feudo (p714)
- ➔ Salumeria (p670)
- ➔ Soul & Fish (p701)

## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Atelier Ines (p670)
- ➔ Casa Mariantonia (p679)
- ➔ Albergo il Monastero (p683)
- ➔ Hotel Piazza Bellini (p670)
- ➔ Palazzo Marziale (p700)

## Why Go?

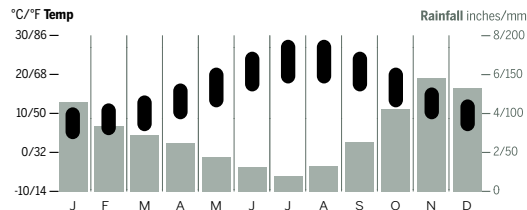
Campania is the Italy of your wildest dreams; a rich, intense, hypnotic *ragù* of Arabesque street life, decadent palaces, pastel-hued villages and aria-inspiring vistas.

Few corners of Europe can match the cultural conundrums here. Should you spend the morning waltzing through chandeliered Bourbon bedrooms or the frescoed villa of a Roman emperor's wife? And which of Caravaggio's canvases shouldn't you miss: the multi-scene masterpiece inside Naples' Pio Monte della Misericordia, or the artist's brooding swansong inside the city's belle époque Palazzo Zevallos?

Mother Nature let loose in Italy's south, creating a thrilling playground of rugged mountains, steaming fumaroles, and ethereal coastal grottoes. Horse ride the slopes of Mt Vesuvius, sail the Amalfi Coast or simply soak at a thermal beach on Ischia. Afterwards, local feasts await; bubbling, wood-fired pizza in Naples, long lunches at Cilento *agriturismi* (farm stays), and lavish pastries at celebrity-status Amalfi Coast *pasticerie* (pastry shops).

## When to Go

### Naples



**May** Best month to visit the region. Warm days, with many special events on.

**Jun & Sep** Generally deliver summer heat without the August crowds and traffic.

**Aug** Hottest month; many shops and restaurants close while locals go on holiday.

## NAPLES

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Italy's third-largest city is one of its oldest, most artistic and most appetising. Naples' *centro storico* (historic centre) is a Unesco World Heritage Site, its archaeological treasures are among the world's most important, and its palaces, castles and churches make Rome look positively provincial.

Then there's the food. Blessed with rich volcanic soils, a bountiful sea, and centuries of culinary know-how, the Naples region is one of Italy's epicurean heavyweights, serving up the country's best pizza, pasta and coffee, and many of its most celebrated seafood dishes, street snacks and sweet treats.

Certainly, Naples' urban sprawl can feel anarchic, tattered and unloved. But look beyond the grime, graffiti and occasional gruffness and you'll uncover a city of breathtaking frescoes, sculptures and panoramas, of unexpected elegance, of spontaneous conversations and profound humanity. Welcome to Italy's most unlikely masterpiece.

### History

After founding nearby Cuma in the 8th century BC, the ancient Greeks settled the city in around 680 BC, calling it Parthenope. Under the Romans, the area became an ancient Miami of sorts: a sun-soaked spa region that drew the likes of Virgil. Dampening the bonhomie was Mt Vesuvius' eruption in AD 79.

Naples fell into Norman hands in 1139 before the French Angevins took control a century later, boosting the city's cred with the mighty Castel Nuovo. By the 16th century, Naples was under Spanish rule and riding high on Spain's colonial riches. By 1600, it was Europe's largest city and a burgeoning baroque beauty adorned by artists like Luca Giordano, Giuseppe de Ribera and Caravaggio.

Despite a devastating plague in 1656, Naples' ego soared under the Bourbons (1734–1860), with epic constructions such as the Teatro San Carlo and the Reggia di Caserta sealing the city's showcase reputation.

An ill-fated attempt at republican rule in 1799 was followed by a short stint under the French and a final period of Bourbon governance before nationalist rebel Giuseppe Garibaldi inspired the city to snip off the puppet strings and join a united Italy in 1860.

Although the Nazis took Naples in 1943, they were quickly forced out by a series of popular uprisings between 26 and 30 September, famously known as the *Quattro*

*giornate di Napoli* (Four Days of Naples). Led by locals, especially by young *scugnizzi* (Neapolitan for 'street urchins') and ex-soldiers, the street battles paved the way for the Allies to enter the city on 1 October.

Despite setting up a provisional government in Naples, the Allies were confronted with an anarchic mass of troops, German prisoners of war and bands of Italian fascists all competing with the city's starving population for food. Overwhelmed, Allied authorities turned to the underworld for assistance. As long as the Allies agreed to turn a blind eye to their black-market activities, the Mafia was willing to help. And so the Camorra (Neapolitan Mafia) was given a boost.

On 23 November 1980, a devastating earthquake struck the mountainous area of Irpinia, 100km east of Naples. The quake, which left more than 2700 people dead and thousands more homeless, caused extensive damage in Naples. It is believed that US\$6.4 billion of the funds poured into the region to assist the victims and rebuilding ended up in the pockets of the Camorra.

In 2011, Neapolitan voters elected the city's current mayor, Luigi de Magistris, a youthful former public prosecutor and vocal critic of both the mafia and government corruption. Determined to improve the city's liveability, de Magistris has pushed through a number of initiatives, including the transformation of the Lungomare from a traffic-clogged thoroughfare into a pedestrian and bike-friendly waterfront strip.

### Sights

#### Centro Storico

##### **Complesso Monumentale di Santa Chiara**

BASILICA

(Map p658; 081 551 66 73; [www.monastero-disantachiara.com](http://www.monastero-disantachiara.com); 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 monastery complex. The church was severely damaged in WWII: what you see today is a 20th-century recreation of Gagliardo Primario's 14th-century original. Adjoining it are the basilica's **cloisters**, adorned with brightly coloured 17th-century majolica tiles and frescoes.