



Independent cycling tour (BCIL)

Paestum & the Cilento

*From the Greek temples of Paestum along the beautiful coast
and into the heartland of the Cilento National Park*



TRIP NOTES

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INTRODUCTION

The region of Campania has been known as a paradise on earth since ancient times. The Greeks built some of their most impressive temples here and under the Romans it became known as 'Campania Felix', or the Happy Land. When travelling through this region one becomes overwhelmed by its wealth of cultural and natural attractions, from the great city of Naples to the well-known Costiera Amalfitana, with its towering cliffs and picturesque coves.

But Campania's real secret is located south of Salerno. Here the coastline bulges out into an expanse of mountainous landmass known as the Cilento, now one of Italy's biggest National Parks, with World Heritage listing.

*This tour brings you into the real **'Heart of the Cilento'**, from ancient Paestum up to Monte Stella, and along the pristine Cilento coast towards the impressive Alburni Mountains. Inland the Cilento is largely undisturbed by the 21st century and you will encounter few other tourists along your way. You will cycle past world-famous cultural sites, through pristine natural areas and dreamy coastal scenery. Your trip will take you on small country roads passing through rough mountain scenery, as well as attractive countryside, with vineyards and olive groves.*

The first few days you will stay close to the coast, only occasionally reaching some small hamlets on the foothills further inland. You will go past the archaeological site of Paestum on your way to a genuine mozzarella farm, and climb up to some nice viewpoints on the coastal plain. Further on you will cycle around Monte Stella, dotted with several typical medieval hamlets, and continue along the coast towards the tiny fishing villages of Acciaroli and Pioppi to the Greek site of Velia.

You then turn inland and discover the rolling foothills around lovely Ceraso before climbing up along the Calore River to the hamlet of Piaggine, located in the very heart of the Cilento National Park. Here you'll visit some of the nicest medieval villages in the area, where the traditional way of life is still evident. And you'll enjoy visiting some of the Cilento's greatest (but unknown) cultural treasures, like St. Michael's cave church in Sant'Angelo a Fasanella, the ruins of Roscigno Vecchia and the castle of Laurino. All connected by great well-paved and quiet roads, ideal for cycling.

Your route back to Paestum takes you along great panoramic roads on the slopes of the Alburni Mountains.



Please note: this is a moderate tour which is suitable for all those who have some experience of bicycle touring and are in a good general physical condition. On some of the inland stretches you may encounter some steeper climbs. Average cycling times: approx 5-6 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 0 – Naples (or Salerno)

Arrival in Naples (or Salerno) in case you arrive a day earlier.

Naples has an international airport. From Rome (and many other cities) Naples and Salerno can easily be reached by train. There are regular AV (high-speed), Eurostar and Intercity trains as well as normal, regional trains. Several hotels can be booked in Naples and Salerno, according to your wishes (either 'downtown' centrally located, or near the harbour or train station, ranging from 3- to 5-star).

N.B. If you arrive one day earlier you have the possibility of paying a visit to the world-famous archaeological museum in Naples, where all the artefacts from Pompeii and Herculaneum are displayed, and/or the equally wonderful Capodimonte museum. It is also possible to make a day trip to Pompeii.

Day 1 – Arrival in Paestum (Capaccio)

After arriving at the Paestum train station you will be picked up for your private transfer to your hotel near the world famous Temples of Paestum. Your bicycles will be waiting for you at the hotel. In alternative you can go pick up your bikes yourself and ride to your hotel. This short trip takes you through part of the River Sele plain and past the temples and city walls of Greek Paestum. Your luggage will be transported to the hotel for you. You can take your bikes down to the beach for a quick dip before turning in and getting settled in at the hotel right next to the archaeological site. In case you have arrived early you can visit the temples already, leaving more time for a longer trip tomorrow. In the evening you enjoy a nice dinner based on local specialties in your hotel.

Accommodation: Hotel* - Paestum**

Distance: 6,5 km. Cycling time: 0,5 h.

Day 2 – Over the plain and through the foothills of Paestum

Your first trip takes you on a ride through the ancient territory of the Greek town of Paestum. You can opt for a relaxed ride through the plain, or a longer and harder one taking you to some nice medieval hamlets in the foothills and offering some amazing views. Before setting off you can visit the temples and the museum of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Paestum and its world-famous Doric temples. Here you will admire not only the three temples, but also other monuments including the amphitheatre, the 'Heroon' tomb, several Greek and Roman houses and one of the towns' impressive gates. In the local museum you can see the exemplary collection of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculptures. Absolutely not to miss is the so-called 'Tomba del Tuffatore' (Diver's Tomb), a rare example of Greek funeral painting. Lunch can be taken at a local buffalo farm where you can taste delicious and genuine fresh mozzarella. Your cycling trip will take you through the plain to the Sele River and past the 'Capo di Fiume' karst springs to the villages of Giugnano and Cicerale (optional) and back down again to your hotel. Dinner is on the premises of your hotel tonight. After dinner you can opt to make another short stroll past the temples and perhaps grab a gelato.

Accommodation: Hotel* - Paestum**

Distance: 33/65,5 km. Cycling time: 2,5/5,5 h.

Day 3 – From Paestum to San Marco di Castellabate

Today you will leave the Paestum plain for a first taste of the real Cilento. Your trip takes you on quiet roads through fragrant Mediterranean maquis and shady olive groves up into the coastal hills above the town of Agropoli, through some dreamy medieval hamlets, and down again to the coastal village of San Marco di Castellabate. From your hotel you head for the villages of Prignano and Torchiara, beautifully situated on the lush green slopes overlooking the Cilento coast. Here you can take your time for a stroll or pause to fill up your



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water bottles and observe the peaceful village life. From Torchiara you then continue to the villages of Laureana and Vatolla where a visit of the 16th-century Palazzo Vargas is a must. The road now starts dipping down, taking you to the seaside resort of Santa Maria di Castellabate. Along this stretch you will enjoy some wonderful views of the Tresino peninsula to your right and Castellabate to your left. A short stretch of road along the coast brings you to San Marco di Castellabate, renowned for its tiny port where able craftsmen continue a centuries-old tradition of building wooden boats by hand. After arriving at your hotel and settling in, you can either cycle or walk the short path along the coast to the wonderful little islet of Leucosia, situated in the marine reserve of Punta Licosa, or take a stroll through the centre of town for a pre-dinner aperitif at one of the local bars.

Accommodation: Hotel* - San Marco di Castellabate**

Distance: 40,5 km. Cycling time: 4 h.

Day 4 – Around Monte Stella: round trip from San Marco di Castellabate

Today's trip starts with a long and winding climb up to the beautifully located town of Castellabate, once a fortified stronghold offering refuge to the local peasants. Here you can take some time to rest and visit the medieval castle, from which you enjoy a splendid view of the coastal hamlets of San Marco and Santa Maria. You then climb further up to Perdifumo and Mercato Cilento, after which your circumnavigation of Monte Stella begins. Along the route your view reaches as far as the Amalfi Coast and Capri, while on clear days it may even be possible to see all the way to Sicily! During this part of your trip you will pass through the exquisite medieval hamlets of Celso, Galdo, Stella Cilento, San Mauro and Rocca Cilento. Each of them merits a stopover to sample their honest simplicity and quiet peace, best savoured sat at the local bar sipping an Italian coffee. The easy roads here pass through chestnut forests, opening up now and then to wonderful views of the inland Cilento, reaching as far as the Alburni and Cervati mountain ranges. At the end of the day you have the choice of turning back again to San Marco by Castellabate, or opt for a slightly longer route that takes you down to the fishing village of Agnone and then along the coast to San Marco. After arriving at your hotel again, it is only a short walk down to the beach for a well-deserved relaxing swim. After dinner there is nothing better than a gelato at the port or in the town's centre to end the day.

Accommodation: Hotel* - San Marco di Castellabate**

Distance: 65 km. Cycling time: 5,5 h.

Day 5 – From San Marco di Castellabate to Ceraso

After leaving San Marco you will head south on the coastal road towards the Alento river plain. A short climb takes you up through Mediterranean maquis and pine woods to the 'Ripe Rosse' or Red Rocks. You then whizz down to the coastal hamlet of Acciaroli, where back in 1952 Ernest Hemingway spent some holidays and – some say – was inspired to write 'The Old Man and the Sea'. Some of the village's elders still remember having met the great author and may be willing to tell you an interesting tale or two. In any case Acciaroli fully merits a stop and a quiet stroll around its little port and town centre. Slightly further along the coast you pass through the fishing village of Pioppi, another delightful little town. Here you will find a small Sea Life Museum dedicated to the local marine fauna and flora.

Pioppi is also famous as the second home of the American professor Ancel Keys, father of the so-called Mediterranean Diet. After visiting the museum you have time for a quick coffee at the seafront before cycling on. The remainder of the coastal road takes you to the plain of the Alento River. At Casalvelino Marina you have the choice of turning inland, or continuing to Marina di Ascea for a visit to the Greek and Roman site of Velia, home to the philosophers Zenon and Parmenides, and cradle of one of Europe's most ancient schools of medicine. Alternatively you can visit the site during tomorrow's trip and opt for a swim before leaving the coast and heading inland. From Casalvelino Marina you will follow the Alento River towards Pattano and its small medieval abbey, opting for one of several – shorter or longer – options. This last stretch of the road first leads



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through ancient olive groves and newly-planted vineyards and then takes you through majestic oak forests to your agriturismo at La Petrosa.

Accommodation: Agriturismo - Ceraso

Distance: 57,5 km. Cycling time: 5 h.

Day 6 – Roundtrip from La Petrosa : Ceraso, Pisciotta and Ascea

During today's roundtrip you will discover the largely unspoilt and often rough landscape between Ceraso, Pisciotta and Ascea. Here few tourists ever set foot, even during the busy summer season, and you are certain to have the quiet roads and peaceful villages all to yourself. From your agriturismo you set out for the medieval hamlet of Ceraso with its characteristic 'palazzi' a little further inland. After visiting Ceraso – maybe you can take some time to have a cappuccino at the local bar – you continue through shady oak and chestnut forests to the tiny, wonderfully located villages of Santa Barbara, Mandia and Rodio high above the Cilento coast. From Rodio you start descending towards the coast, passing through groves of enormous local olive trees. A short detour brings you to the hilltop village of Pisciotta where you can leave your bikes in the central square and freely explore the well-preserved medieval centre. Lunch may be had in one of the town's several restaurants, tasting local specialties sat at a table with views reaching from Monte Stella to the north and Capo Palinuro to the south. From Pisciotta you continue in a northern direction, first to Ascea and then down in the direction of Velia. If you didn't visit the archaeological site the day before now is the time to explore it. Amongst its remains one finds the celebrated 'Porta Rosa', one of the first examples of the use of the vault in Greek architecture. Other monuments worth exploring are the port, the Greek and Roman baths and the agora. The town's acropolis in medieval times has been reused as a local stronghold and preserves a magnificent medieval bastion. From Velia you will head up again on small roads to the agriturismo.

Accommodation: Agriturismo - Ceraso

Distance: 45,5 km. Cycling time: 4 h.

Day 7 – From La Petrosa through the rough inland of the Cilento to Piaggine

Today you will head inland towards the real and largely unknown heart of the Cilento, between the Gelbison and Cervati mountain ranges. From your agriturismo you first pass Ceraso again, and then head for the villages of Massascusa, San Biase and Massa. As most of your trip is uphill, any of these tiny hamlets are a good place to get off and pause to fill up your water bottles or have a coffee. After passing Vallo della Lucania, which is one of the largest towns in the Cilento area, you continue to Moio della Civitella. Here you can visit the remains of a small fortified site of Lucanian, i.e. pre-Greek origin. From a small church on top of the hill you can admire a wonderful view of the Cilento. Further up the road you will come to Gioi, rightly famous for its so-called 'sopressata', a wonderfully tasty locally produced salami, calling for a stop at the butcher's shop. While continuing towards Stio and Magliano Nuova, the Mediterranean woods and olive groves make way for chestnut and oak trees. You will now cycle through long stretches of uncultivated land until arriving at the Calore River, one of the few Italian water courses where the European otter can still be seen. Shortly after, you come to Laurino, which is situated under a deep gorge eroded by the Calore River. An easy walk through its narrow alleys takes you to the local castle dominating the town. From Laurino it is then only a short stretch of road to your agriturismo at Piaggine.

Accommodation: Agriturismo - Piaggine

Distance: 54 km. Cycling time: 4,5 h.



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Day 8 – From Piaggine to Paestum : Sacco, Roscigno Vecchia, Castelcivita

Your last day's trip takes you from 'rugged' Piaggine to 'cultured' Paestum again. During this last day you will go past several natural and cultural highlights, all worth a short visit. After a brief climb up from the agriturismo, the road starts leading down all the way to the scenic hamlet of Sacco, directly underneath several high limestone cliffs. At Sacco you have the opportunity to visit the Sammaro gorge, situated a short walk from the village. Alternatively you can admire the gorge from the road – the bridge passes right over it! After Sacco you arrive at the village of Roscigno where the old centre – Roscigno Vecchia, the 'Pompeii of the 19th century' – was abandoned at the beginning of the 20th century and has since been preserved unchanged. After visiting the abandoned village and its tiny crafts museum, you will continue along the slopes of the valley of the Calore River to Corleto and then to Sant' Angelo a Fasanella. In this last village, the local church of Saint Michael, built inside a cave, is really worth a visit. From Sant'Angelo, or from nearby Ottati, you can opt for an additional few kilometres up on the spectacular high plateau of the Alburni mountains – only for the fitter cyclists though! Your next stop will then be at Castelcivita. Here the karst erosion of the limestone mountain core has created a complex of caves over 5000 metres long, 1700 metres of which are accessible to visitors. After visiting the caves, your route takes you to the hamlet of Controne and then further down beneath the town of Roccadaspide to the plain of Paestum. You now head back towards the temples to arrive at your hotel. You are free to make your own dinner arrangements tonight, selecting from the good choice of restaurants for a last great dinner, overlooking the Greek temples at night.

Accommodation: Hotel* - Paestum**

Distance: 71 km. Cycling time: 6 h.

Day 9 – Departure

The tour ends in Paestum after breakfast today. A private transfer can take you back to Naples or Salerno. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic hotels or agriturismos (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Dinners are included 5 times, except for your stay in San Marco di Castellabate and last night at Paestum when you are free to make your own dinner arrangements.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details & prices on request.

INCLUDED

- 8 nights accommodation – BB/HB
- Accommodation: 3 nights Paestum, 2 nights San Marco di Castellabate, 2 nights Ceraso, 1 night Piaggine; all nights in good *** hotels and agriturismo
- Meals: 8 breakfasts, 5 dinners
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 50.000 scale (or better)
- GPS waypoints and tracks (optional)
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transfer
- Private transfers as specified

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature
- Bicycle rental (available on request)



LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate (3): Mostly moderate rides but inevitably with several climbs, only a few of which are really strenuous. All roads are well paved and mostly quiet, with little traffic except for some stretches near Paestum during the first two days and the last. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on some days.

Fitness: Some experience of bicycle touring and a good general physical condition will certainly make your travel experience more enjoyable. You should be able to cycle for several hours a day even in hot dry weather conditions.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in PAESTUM which can easily be reached by train from either Naples or Salerno. Naples has an international airport. From Rome (and many other cities) Naples and Salerno, and thus Paestum, can easily be reached.

Departure: The tour ends in PAESTUM on day 9. A short transfer can bring you to the local train station, where you can easily travel on to either Salerno or Naples.

TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to include extra nights in any of the accommodations 'en route'. Extra cycling and/or sightseeing options can be provided! It is also possible to extend your tour with a few days in the Cilento or Salerno, along the beautiful Costiera Amalfitana or in Naples. Details & prices on request.

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