



Independent cycling tour (BRCI9)

Paestum and Cilento Bike Challenge

Riding through the amazing scenery of the Cilento National Park, one of the biggest and most diverse in Italy



TRIP NOTES 2024

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GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit Of Italy



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 the 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 is an area offering endless possibilities to the road cyclist, amateur and experienced semi-professional alike. A few flat areas, mainly concentrated along the coast, immediately make way for rolling hill country punctuated by several low mountains. This makes for an interesting ride, where challenging climbs and exhilarating descents follow at breathtaking pace.

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. 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 cultural treasures, like Greek Paestum and Velia, and the ruins of Roscigno Vecchia. All connected by great well-paved and quiet roads, ideal for road cycling.

The first day you will move inland from the plain of Paestum, cycling through the Cilento's foothills offering wide views of its marvellous coastline. You'll pass through Trentinara, spectacularly located on top of a sheer rock cliff, and stop at Felitto near the spectacular canyon of the Calore River, where you can admire several medieval bridges. The next couple of days you will explore the mountainous inland of the region, circling the Alburni mountains and maybe even climbing up to its high plateau, visiting the marvellous limestone caves of Castelcivita. You will then pass through the wild nature of the Cervati Massif on your way to the village of Morigerati situated high above the Gulf of Policastro in the far south of the Cilento Region. From here you then discover the pristine mountainous area above the Gulf of Policastro, dotted with little hidden hamlets such as Casaletto, Spartano and Sicilì, and pass underneath the towering limestone cliffs of Monte Bulgheria, while circling the Mingardo River valley. The next day you continue along the coast and through the rolling hills of the coastal area to the little fishing village of Pioppi. On your way you will have plenty of opportunities to admire the wide views that open up to you along the way. On your last full cycling day you tackle Monte Stella, passing through several of the villages dotting its slopes, before turning back in the end along the coastal road to Agropoli and Paestum.



Please note: this is a moderate to hard tour for which experience of road cycling and a good general physical condition are necessary for your travel experience to be enjoyable. Average cycling times: approx. 5-7 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Paestum

After your arrival at Paestum you head for the hotel and get settled in. In case you didn't bring your own bike, you will go to pick up your rental bike. The short trip back to your hotel takes you past the temples and city walls of Greek Paestum. Alternatively you can go for a short ride or head down to the beach. In the evening you can have a pre-dinner 'aperitivo' in one of the bars with a view of the temples, before eating dinner at the hotel.

Accommodation: Hotel in Paestum

Day 2 – Paestum to Bellosguardo

Before setting off for your first day's cycling trip you can take your time to visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Paestum and its famous Greek temples. After your visit you can hop on your bikes and start your cycling adventure. From the archaeological site of Paestum you head in the direction of the foothills of the Cilento area, passing first through Ogliastro Cilento and then towards Cicerale. From Cicerale you cycle through lush countryside to the village of Trentinara, spectacularly located on top of a sheer rock face where you enjoy a magnificent view over the Paestum plain. You then continue on to the villages of Monteforte Cilento and Magliano Vetere. Along your way you'll have plenty of time for a refreshing stop in one of the villages to fill up your water bottles and enjoy a coffee. You can stop for lunch along the road, either at Magliano Vetere or shortly after. Then you enter the valley of the Calore River, passing through Felitto and Castel San Lorenzo. Along this stretch of your trip you can admire several medieval bridges crossing the river, all the while cycling through beautiful countryside on quiet, well-paved roads. The last part of your day's trip takes you to your lovely family-run agriturismo near the panoramic village of Bellosguardo. Here you have the opportunity to relax on your terrace while sipping a glass of wine with a wonderful view over the agriturismo's vineyards before having a well-deserved dinner.

Accommodation: Agriturismo in Bellosguardo

Distance : 83 km - Altitude gain : 1670m - Cycling time (no breaks included): 5 hours

Day 3 – Roundtrip of the Alburni Mountains

Today you will make a roundtrip of the Alburni Mountains, which takes you from the Cilento area into the Diano Valley and back again. After breakfast you leave Bellosguardo and head in the direction of Corleto Monforte. You climb up to the 'Passodella Sentinella', after which you enjoy a swift descent to the villages of San Rufo and San Pietro al Tanagro. Ahead you see the Diano Valley and, behind it, the first mountains of the Basilicata region. When you arrive at the valley floor you turn north and start following the Tanagro River towards Polla. You now start cycling underneath the high limestone cliff faces of the Alburni Mountains, first slowly climbing up to the village of Petina and then down again through thick chestnut groves to Sicignano degli Alburni. Here you can stop for lunch and a quick visit to this small town with its imposing castle. Shortly after Sicignano you start heading south again. You now pass directly beneath the sheer cliffs until you reach Controne. At the next village, Castelvita, you can stop to visit the marvellous limestone caves which are over 5000 metres long, 1700 m of which are accessible to the public. After your visit to the caves you continue on winding country roads to Ottati and Sant'Angelo a Fasanella where you can go and see the local church of Saint Michael, built inside a cave. Alternatively, from Petina you could climb up to the Alburni's high plateau with its beautiful beech forests, and experience the exhilarating descent towards Sant'Angelo a Fasanella. This will shorten your trip significantly, but the climb up is a really thorough one, reaching nearly 1300m! From Sant'Angelo, a short stretch of road brings you to Corleto Monforte again, where you return to your agriturismo at Bellosguardo. Tonight's dinner will be based on local products, accompanied by the agriturismo's own wine.

Accommodation: Agriturismo in Bellosguardo

Distance : 80/105 km – Altitude gain : 1570m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours



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Day 4 – From Bellosguardo to Morigerati

Today's trip takes you from the Alburni Mountains to the little village of Morigerati high above the Gulf of Policastro in the south of the Cilento area. You leave Bellosguardo in the morning and after a few km reach 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 pass on the bridge high above the Sammaro Gorge and arrive at Sacco, located directly beneath several high limestone cliffs. From Sacco you start climbing up into the Monte Cervati mountain range, the very heart of the Cilento. You follow quiet roads through cultivated fields and wild forests, often without meeting any traffic for long stretches. From Piaggine you climb up to the Croce di Pruno plateau situated at 1200 m. You then launch yourself into the exhilarating descent that takes you in the direction of the isolated village of Rofrano. However, just before arriving here, you will turn east and, after a short climb, head for the little town of Sanza, situated on a hilltop in the Bussento River Valley. From Sanza a winding road flanking the river takes you first to the hamlet of Caselle in Pittari and then to delightful Casaletto Spartano. Up here in the mountains you will cycle through deep gorges and wild nature, enjoying unexpected views of the Gulf of Policastro! From Casaletto you then continue to Torraca before arriving at your evening's base in the medieval village of Morigerati. Alternatively you could head straight from Caselle in Pittari to Morigerati, shortening your route by several km. Tonight you'll have a great dinner based on local specialties.

Accommodation: Country inn at Morigerati

Distance : 78/109 km – Altitude gain : 1610 / 1950 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours

Day 5 – Roundtrip of Monte Bulgheria, the Mingardo Valley and the Gulf of Policastro

After an early breakfast you start your next cycling day with a wonderful stretch downhill to Sapri, the main town on the Gulf of Policastro. During the descent you will enjoy some spectacular views of the coast and pass through one of the Cilento's last cork oak groves. From Sapri you then continue on along the coast to Villamare and Policastro Bussentino. Alternatively, you could descend from Morigerati directly to Policastro. After stopping over at delightful little Scario where you can enjoy a cappuccino at a bar overlooking the port, you will start climbing up the steep road leading into the foothills of Monte Bulgheria. You now cycle underneath the steep limestone cliffs of the mountain, passing through Bosco and Poderia on your way to the small abandoned hamlet of San Severino, standing in a marvellous scenic location above a deep canyon. A short diversion can take you to the wonderful medieval village of Roccagloriosa, clinging to a steep hill which dominates the Mingardo River valley. Here you take a short stroll through the historical centre and pause for a refreshing drink before moving on. From San Severino you start gently climbing up to the little town of Futani, passing through several small villages and enjoying marvellous views of the coast along your way. Shortly before arriving at Futani you will turn towards Abatemarco and then climb up to the village of Montana Antilia, nicely situated beneath the peaks of the Gelbison mountain range, and the highest point of your day's trip. Alternatively you can head directly from Poderia to Montano Antilia, which is a steep climb but takes several km off your trip.

From Montano Antilia you then continue to Alfano and Torre Orsaia, passing underneath the heavily wooded Monte Centaurino, after which you will enjoy the swift descent into the Bussento River valley again. The short climb up to Sicili, and then Morigerati, where a nice hot shower and a hearty dinner are waiting for you, then ends your day.

Accommodation: Country inn at Morigerati

Distance : 91 / 115 km – Altitude gain : 1520 / 2230m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5 / 7 hours



Day 6 – From Morigerati to Pioppi

Today's stage takes you along a large part of the southern coast of the Cilento to the little fishing village of Pioppi, situated below Monte Stella. You will cycle through the hilly country close to the coast, passing by olive groves and chestnut forests. You start by descending from Morigerati to Policastro Bussentino, and then climb steeply up to San Giovanni a Piro. Once you arrive in the village, lying directly underneath the steep cliffs of Monte Bulgheria, the hardest part of the day is already behind you. Indeed, from here on you will enjoy an exhilarating descent towards the coast at Marina di Camerota – an ideal spot for a cup of coffee or a cappuccino in the delightful little village square – and then continue along the beautiful coastal road to laidback Palinuro and the medieval hilltop village of Pisciotta, dominated by enormous trees in the olive groves. Alternatively you could climb up from Marina to Camerota and then head to Licusati where you then have the opportunity to enjoy an exhilarating descent full of hairpin curves into the Mingardo River valley, before cycling to Palinuro. This option will only add a few km to your day's trip, but up to 400m of altitude gain! After passing through Pisciotta you will head inland again, climbing up to the hamlets of Rodio and Terradura, beautifully located in lush mountain scenery, and then descend to the coast again. After passing through Ascea you will arrive at Castellammare di Stabia. Here you have the opportunity to visit the archaeological site of Velia, home to the Greek philosophers Zeno and Parmenides, and cradle of one of Europe's most ancient schools of medicine. Amongst its remains one finds the celebrated 'Porta Rosa' (Pink Gate), one of the first examples of the use of the vault in Greek architecture. Alternatively you could continue from Pisciotta directly to Ascea, leaving you more time to visit Velia and relax in the afternoon. In any case, after your visit to the site you continue through the Alento River plain on flat roads to Casalvelino Marina. From here it's a short stretch to your hotel (or agriturismo).

Accommodation: Hotel in Casalvelino Marina

Distance : 88/98 km – Altitude gain : 1325/1620 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours

Day 7 – Roundtrip of Monte Stella

Today you will explore the small back roads connecting the many hamlets on the slopes of Monte Stella. From your hotel in Pioppi you head inland and, shortly after, start climbing up to Acquavella. From there on you continuously climb and descend through the wooded hill country, first to Stella Cilento and then to Omignano. Here you can stop for a short break to fill up your water bottles and you can take your time to drink a cup of coffee at a local bar. You then have the opportunity of climbing up to the very top of Monte Stella, looking out over most of the Cilento region, which will add another 13 km and 650 metres of altitude gain to your day's trip! You can continue straight to the village of Sessa Cilento, where you start descending into the valley of the Alento River, on the inland side of Monte Stella. Following the river valley you arrive at the hamlets of Lustra and Rocca Cilento. You then turn west towards the coast and start heading for the little town of Castellabate, passing by Mercato Cilento and Matonti. From here you can enjoy an enchanting panorama of the Cilento coast with the promontories of Punta Tresino and Punta Licosa in front of you. Alternatively you can head directly from Sessa Cilento to Mercato Cilento and Matonti. You will arrive at Castellabate, beautifully located on a hill high above the coast, in time for lunch. After visiting the delightful medieval centre of the town, dominated by its castle, you then continue along the south-western slopes of Monte Stella. You first climb slightly up to Perdifumo and then continue up and down to Serramezzana and San Mauro Cilento. The last stretch of road in the foothills of Monte Stella takes you through the splendid medieval hamlets of Galdo and Celso to Pollica, where you enjoy an exhilarating descent towards the fishing village of Pioppi, known as the second home of the American professor Ancel Keys, father of the so-called Mediterranean Diet. From Pioppi you then follow the coastal road back to Casalvelino Marina and your hotel in time for an aperitif and dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel in Casalvelino Marina

Distance : 74/98 km – Altitude gain : 1550/2300 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 5/6 hours



Day 8 – From Casalvelino to Paestum

Your final day's trip takes you along the coast from Casalvelino to Paestum. This will be a relatively short and easy ride, giving you the opportunity to relax and enjoy your last day on the Cilento roads. First you pass through the seaside village of Acciaroli. Back in 1952, Ernest Hemingway spent some holidays here 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 you can have a short break for a quick cup of coffee or cappuccino. After Acciaroli you will pass through Agnone, after which you climb up the modest incline of the 'Ripe Rosse' or Red Rocks. From here you go downhill to Case del Conte and Ogliastro Marina. You now pass below the village of Castellabate and continue in the direction of Agropoli. Following small country roads you arrive at the town's port. The historical centre, located on steep limestone crags above the port, is well worth a visit. From Agropoli a few flat km take you to Paestum again. Perhaps it is a good idea to stop at a buffalo farm along the way to have lunch on its premises, tasting genuine fresh buffalo mozzarella. After arriving at your hotel, you can freshen up and spend the afternoon relaxing in the hotel's garden, or head for the beach. Those who feel like it can visit the museum of the archaeological site, exploring its collections of prehistoric utensils, Greek vases and Roman sculptures. Not to be missed is the so-called 'Tomba del Tuffatore' (Diver's Tomb), a rare example of Greek funeral painting. You are free to make your own dinner arrangements tonight, taking your pick from the good choice of restaurants for your last great dinner, overlooking the Greek temples.

Accommodation: Hotel in Paestum

Distance : 55 km – Altitude gain : 600 m - Cycling time (no breaks included) : 3 hours

Day 9 – End of the tour

The tour ends in Paestum after breakfast today. A short private transfer takes you to the local train station where Salerno and Naples are easily reached. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



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 on all nights except for the last one at Paestum.

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 will be passing through.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

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

INCLUDED

- Accommodation: 2 nights Paestum, 2 nights Bellosguardo, 2 nights Morigerati, 2 nights Casalvelino Marina (or Pioppi); all nights in good 3-star hotels, agriturismo's and country inns.
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 50.000 scale (or better) ; GPS tracks
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport
- 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 (high quality road racing bikes. You may want to bring your own saddle and pedals)

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate to hard (3/4): Moderate to hard rides (to road cycling standards) inevitably with several climbs, some of which can be quite long and strenuous. All roads are well paved and mainly quiet, with little traffic except for some stretches near Paestum. Extensions or shortcuts are possible on most days.

Fitness: Experience of road cycling and a good general physical condition are necessary to make your travel experience enjoyable. You should be able to cycle for several hours a day and long distances 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 after breakfast in PAESTUM on day 9. A short transfer can bring you to the local train station where you can easily travel on to Salerno and Naples.

TOUR VARIATIONS

PERSONALISED ROUTES

This tour is only an example of a possible 'Cilento Bike Challenge'. This tour can be adapted to your wishes and special interests. You can book extra nights in beautiful places, such as Positano, or at the end of the tour to spend a few days at the beach. This tour can be used as a framework to create a personalised tour, longer or shorter, or with fewer different accommodations. Details and prices on request.

GROUP TOURS

This tour is offered as a self-guided tour. It is however possible to organise this – or a similar, personalised tour, as a group tour, including a guide and a support vehicle. Also partly supported (only for the most challenging stretches) tours are available on request. Please contact us. For small groups discounts are available.

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to extend your tour with a few days at Salerno, along the beautiful Costiera Amalfitana or at Naples. Details and prices on request. Extra cycling and/or sightseeing options can be provided!

UPGRADE

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

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