

# Kate and Ed's Amalfi Coast of Italy file



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## **Acknowledgements**

We owe a serious debt of gratitude for all of our Italy experiences to our friend Peter Yannotta. Peter has been travelling to different parts of Italy for weeks at a time on and off for many years. In 2011 after experimenting with other places he had pretty much settled on the Sorrento area as the ideal base camp location. We were fortunate enough to get a call from him saying he had rented a villa for three weeks (see [Villa Maria](#)) and was offering us a room for the week of our choice. We were smart enough not to hesitate. He had already figured out so many things – drivers, restaurants, day trips, and over the years the hardest thing has been to make room to try new things because our list of places we want to return to is so appealing. We've been back with Peter, on our own, and with other friends, but he is always with us in spirit.

## **Base camps**

We've based ourselves in a few different places along the Amalfi Coast – my favorite is in **Central Sorrento**. It has the advantage of giving you enough to do right there without needing a car – restaurants, shopping, beach clubs. Even better, there is a ferry port that allows for day trips to Capri, Ischia, Amalfi, Positano, and Naples.

You'll read below that we also have stayed in a gated community south of Sorrento, near a smaller village. There are lots of options like this in those small villages, and they can be quiet and beautiful. Only challenge is that you need to plan to spend a lot more on transportation, either car of your own or more use of a car and driver

We've also spent a week at a time on the **Island of Capri**. For us, that meant staying on Capri, but it is possible to take day trips via ferry from there to Positano, Amalfi, Naples, and Sorrento. The only catch is that the last boats of the day back to Capri are pretty early, so it would be difficult to do an Italian style dinner on the mainland and get back to the island.

We've also based in **Positano**. The plusses are that there is a beachfront right there and also ferries that will get you to Amalfi, Capri, Sorrento and down farther south to Salerno. It is also closer to the other cities on the southern part of the coast like Ravello, Maori, and Maiori. It is harder to find a place that is sheltered from the tourist hordes.

## **Day Trips**

### *Ischia*

From Sorrento or Naples, you can catch a ferry several times a day to Ischia. Staying on the island I think is more popular with European tourists than with Americans. It's a volcanic island (there was an earthquake that did some damage in 2017 just before we visited) and it is known for thermal baths and pools, some of which you can access, or so I hear, from the basements of hotels.



Our exposure to Ischia is limited to a few visits to what I guess you would call a waterpark called Il Terme di Poseidon, or just Poseidon. It's not like a kids water park, more like a water spa. There is a beach, but the real feature is a series of indoor and outdoor pools, grottos, and showers with different temperatures and mineral content. There is a whole route you can follow that has something to do with promoting your good health. You pay one price to get through the gate (and rent a towel/locker/and mandatory swim cap if you need them), and then

wander the grounds as you like. You will see all of humanity. If you see a woman in a one piece swimsuit (and there aren't many) you can be pretty sure she is an American – everyone else is much more comfortable in their own skin. There is an on-site café and a sort of med-spa where you can book massages. Heads up – great massage and body treatments, but heads up – they are much less concerned with your modesty than in spas in the U.S. (meaning, strip down and don't expect much draping of the sheets, but nobody does anything inappropriate). The rooms I've been in have curtains instead of solid doors, so if you are face down and hear voices they may be in the hall or it might be other employees dropping by. There is more of an efficiency model than a luxury model at work here – health as serious business.

### *Pompeii*

Yes, you should probably go. A half day starting early in the morning, if you are based in Sorrento, is a good plan. So is a driver and a private guide. No, we have never done it, there always seems to be something more appealing to do, like doing nothing. I'm done feeling bad about it.

## Ravello



This is a really beautiful village in the hills above the coast. It is known for a music festival and for two public gardens – Villa Rufolo at left

(<http://www.villarufolo.it/thegarden.html>)



And Villa Cimbrone

(<https://www.hotelvillacimbrone.com/>)

which also has a hotel on site

Check out the “Where we Eat” section for one of my favorites.

## Capri

If you take a day trip to Capri, you’ll have lots of company. The typical day would be either to go from the port up to the village of Capri, walk around visiting all the (pretty expensive) shops down the small streets and alleys, and have a great lunch. Lots of people never leave the port, and arrange to go see the Blue Grotto, which involves going out in a small boat, and then transferring to a smaller boat you lay down in while they shoot you into the Grotto. It’s beautiful, but you aren’t guaranteed to get in on any given day – depends on the weather and the waves.

You can also go further up the island to Anacapri, which is a little quieter, and from there you can take a sort of ski-lift contraption to the very top.

## **Where we stay**

Not going to lie, we haven't gone budget when we have picked places to stay on the Amalfi Coast. We have based in villas as well as in hotels. If you are travelling with a group, a villa rental is a great way to get luxury at a great price. If you are travelling alone or in a pair, there are lots of hotels at lots of price points – great views and pools will push the price up, as will places that are walkable and limit your need for a car.

Here are the ones we can report on first hand:

### *Le Sirenuse Hotel in Positano*

[https://sirenuse.it/en?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI0uettInL4QIVCYbICh3s3g\\_5EAAYAiAAEgLBvD\\_BwE](https://sirenuse.it/en?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI0uettInL4QIVCYbICh3s3g_5EAAYAiAAEgLBvD_BwE)



There are lots of hotels in Positano, which is laid out basically from the waterfront up the cliffs. Le Sirenuse has been around for years, and is one of the small number that offers a private pool, which is a welcome alternative to the beaches – they can be crowded and are more rocky than sandy. When we stayed there years ago, we used points, and I'm not sure that they are part of any program that accepts points anymore. Like many hotels in this area, because of the topography they aren't really arranged with cookie-cutter rooms down long straight

hallways. There are amazing (and amazingly expensive) suites. We had a run of house room with probably one of the worst views, but I can't say that it disappointed. One of my most vivid memories is hearing fireworks, laughing, and music until about 2 a.m. When Italians get married, it goes late, it goes loud and fireworks are the norm.

### *Villa Maria in Massa Lubrense*

<https://www.airbnb.com/rooms/22276430?guests=1&adults=1>

OK, for this one you need a bunch of friends and a car, or at least a driver on call. It is a four suite house with multiple decks, two living rooms, and a kitchen with its own pizza oven in a gated community. Massa Lubrense is a small village south of Sorrento along the coast. You can't really walk to anything from this villa, except to the seawater community pool, which you reach by going down about 200 stone steps. Down isn't bad, up is rough. You can also get directly into the sea from the pool. The décor isn't lux and some of the bathrooms are a little strange (one has a big hump in the middle of the bathtub you have to straddle to take a shower), but the beds were good and the views are amazing. When we stayed there, a housekeeper came every day with breakfast of yogurt, fruit, and pastries, and she was available for hire to do dinner in as well. There's a nice indoor dining room but the best seat in the house is on the terrace outside the kitchen with beautiful plantings and a killer view of Capri.



Funny story, Ed and I first stayed at this villa in 2011. There are bookcases throughout the villa with books in a wide variety of languages – English, German, Russian, and of course Italian. At one point, since there were not safes in the room at the time and we didn't yet have a sense of how secure the area was, Ed wanted to stash some Euros somewhere other than our pockets. He picked a book called *Scratch*- clever, right – and put about 300-400 Euros

in it. You can imagine what happened next – after all, there was a lot of wine consumed. Fast forward several years, and we are on a plane back to Italy. I will never know for sure when he remembered that he had left the money behind. Maybe he knew at the time and forgot, and just remembered again when we were en route. In any case, that was the first time I had heard about it. So, of course, the first thing we did when we got back to “our room” was looks for the book – and found a surprise windfall for our trip that was put to

Villa La Contessina in Sorrento City Center <https://www.lacontessinasorrento.com/>



I like to think of this as our home away from home. I think we have stayed here three or four times at this point, but twice was enough to make us feel like we were coming back to see an old friend. This is a villa right in the center of

town, but it is inside a beautiful walled garden that really gives you a quiet privacy with all of the advantages of being within walking distance of the beach, the ferry port, and all of the restaurants, bars, and shopping areas you need. There is a nice living/dining area, a full kitchen, and four master suites upstairs you reach via an elevator or outside staircase. There are balconies upstairs, but the real treasure is the outdoor patio and dining area on the first floor. In the garden there is another studio suite, and there's even laundry facilities. Anastasia Delvecchio is the proprietress, I guess you would say. She doesn't live on site, but is always there to greet you, often accompanied by her mother, and is available with great advice. She has become a friend and joins us when she can on our adventures. She even spent a day with me driving into Naples in search of stores that carry fabrics straight off the designer runways.

*Hotel Caesar Augustus in Anacapri on the Island of Capri* [https://www.caesar-augustus.com/?gclid=EAlalQobChMItn3r8Lz\\_4AIVDxgMChf0DmAcaEAAYAiAAEgJwQ\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.caesar-augustus.com/?gclid=EAlalQobChMItn3r8Lz_4AIVDxgMChf0DmAcaEAAYAiAAEgJwQ_D_BwE)

Yes, another splurgy place. For a few of our trips, we combined a stay at a villa on the mainland with some time at this small (50-60) room family owned and operated Relais and Chateaux property. Capri is a big rock – you come ashore at the marina, go up a winding hill to Capri town, and up some more on the narrow winding road to Anacapri. Anacapri isn't exactly the top of the island, but it is as high as you are going to get without getting on the ski lift type of thing that you can catch from the center of the village. The idea is that Anacapri is smaller and quieter than Capri, though if you stay on the island overnight, everything gets a little less crazy once the last ferry of the evening takes the daytrippers back to the mainland.



The place has been a hotel for years, and is now run by a family from Naples that made their money in another business. Just recently (2018), a son who also had a first career in business returned to take a

more visible role in day to day management – someone in the family is on property and highly visible every day. There really aren't any cookie-cutter rooms. Our favorite is room 409, which is in a separate building called the Villa California and has a balcony overlooking the gardens. You have a view down to the marina and over to the island of Ischia and the mainland from virtually everywhere on the property. We are pretty sure that they employ someone to walk around the grounds and spray perfume in the air on a daily basis.

Breakfast is included and is served indoors in a pretty room that overlooks the pool. Oh, that pool – it is a two tiered infinity style – just hang over the edge and stare out at the sea.



Lunch is al fresco and the views are even better than the food, drinks and antipasti are served on the main terrace with live music most nights. There is a very fancy restaurant on site for dinner called Lucellus, which is lovely but not for every night. As is the case in many restaurants in this part of the world, a lot of the food comes from the gardens on site, and the landscaping is gorgeous.

If you can tear yourself away, and you really should once in a while, the main part of the village is just about a five minute walk away – uphill again, but not bad. Several of the restaurants that are a little farther out will arrange to send a car for you either to the hotel or to the main square in town and drop you off again after supper.

## **Where we eat**

For us, this is what it is all about – sitting around somewhere with a beautiful view, usually after a great meal, and talking about where to go next. We aren't that great at giving advice about sites to see, but I feel like we have really nailed it on dining experiences. And most of them really give you a full experience; great food is a given and to go with it you get jaw-dropping views, amazing personalities, or both. Don't get me wrong, we have stopped in to more than our share of more budget-friendly trattorias and gelaterias, but these are our regular spots and our splurges.

You are going to eat a lot of tomato, a lot of fish, a lot of lemon flavored stuff.

*Antica Trattoria*, Sorrento <https://www.lanticatrattoria.com/>



This is a great place within walking distance of the Villa La Contessina in the main shopping district of Sorrento. It's open lunch and dinner and has indoor and outdoor seating, and kind of an in-between open-air terrace that is my favorite. It's a place that actually recognizes repeat visitors, even if you haven't been there for a year or two, or at least does a good imitation of remembering you. There is usually a complimentary glass of prosecco, and they often have a nice version of fried zucchini flowers. There are waiters that have been there forever, along with some younger ones including Antonino, a real charmer.

*Il Buco*, Sorrento <http://www.ilbucoristorante.it/en/home>

This is a Michelin star restaurant right in the center of Sorrento. The indoor rooms have vaulted



stone ceilings and there are also outside tables in kind of a raised walkway lined in stone. If you have a larger group, there is even a private room, which we booked when we had about ten people. Other meals we had there were great too, but with this one, we got the chef coming in to the room and basically saying that he was there to cook for us, and while the menu was terrific,

he would make us whatever we wanted. Fancy but not formal, a special night out, not a cheap pizza date.

*Bagni Delfino*, Sorrento [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant\\_Review-g187782-d1806249-Reviews-Ristorante\\_Bagni\\_Delfino-Sorrento\\_Province\\_of\\_Naples\\_Campania.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g187782-d1806249-Reviews-Ristorante_Bagni_Delfino-Sorrento_Province_of_Naples_Campania.html)



Most of Sorrento is up above the shore, but this restaurant is down in the Marina Grand area, right on the water, really right over the water. It's not a place to eat in bad weather, but during the hot weather you can catch a great breeze under the shade. There's no website, so hopefully this Trip Advisor link works. Last time we were there, each of us was given a Virgin Mary medal as we left for luck and protection.

*Zio Sam*, Piano di Sorrento <http://www.ristoranteziosam.it/>



You get to this place by taking a cab, or something, up into the hills above Sorrento. You are rewarded for the trip by with another great view across the valley and a home pizzeria/trattoria that feels like the family run place that it is . Zio Sam means Uncle Sam, and he is often there. If you get lucky, or have a friend like people who is so charming and memorable with you, you also get to visit the garden that is the source of a lot of the produce they use in the restaurant. Last time we were there, they were also using the garden to host weddings and other parties. This is one of those places where you can order from the menu, or you can just ask them to bring you food. It is one of the more budget friendly places we go to, if you don't include the cost of getting there.

*Relais Blu, Massa Lubrense* <http://www.relaisblu.com/>



Like so many beautiful places in this region, Relais Blu is located high up above the coastline. Your first impression will be of the white tiles, white walls, white furniture, all designed to set off the view of the sea. The action is out on the terrace – there is indoor dining, but why? Go the hour before sunset, park on one of the couches for a drink, then when the sun sets, move over to the tables for a lovely

coursed meal. They don't seem to worry about turning tables more than once – no one will hurry you. I still can't forget a hot basil risotto I had there, with a small scoop of parmesan gelato right in the middle of the dish – sounds crazy, tastes amazing.

*Don Alfonso 1890, Sant'Agata* <https://www.donalfonso.com/>



This is a Michelin Star restaurant in a small village run by a family that is highly visible. The second generation runs the kitchen now, and Livia Iaccarino, the matriarch, stops by tables regularly to give you an enthusiastic run-down of where the food is sourced from (often their own farm) and to urge you to use the bread to mop up all the sauce on your plate. The food looks fancy, but you are meant to savor every bit as if you were at your grandmother's table.

If you get lucky, you may get invited to see their wine cellar that you enter via a building across the courtyard from the dining room. When you first go in, it looks pretty cool, old with stone walls, but as you go further you see this staircase dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century that leads down to an old well at the bottom that is now used to age cheese.





There are a few rooms you can stay in overnight, a nice little pool, and a cooking school on site as well

*Chez Black*, Positano <http://www.chezblack.it/index-en.php>



Chez Black is located along the beachfront walkway close to the ferry dock. It's always busy, but you can usually find a table without too much of a wait. It's pretty much a classic

trattoria/pizzeria, but I guess the location is what makes it special for a pretty inexpensive meal in a pretty expensive town. Oh, and I had the best ever arancini there.

*Cove dei Saraceni*, Positano <https://www.covodeisaraceni.it/restaurant-and-bar/>

This is another option right on the waterfront in Positano. A little fancier, a little more expensive, with a nice covered patio. Not quite as busy and crowded as Chez Black, but both are a treat. It is also a hotel.



### *Hotel Caruso Restaurant, Ravello*

This hotel is in Ravello, about 1,000 feet above sea level. Like many others, it's an old monastery or something, and there is a main restaurant open only for dinner. Our favorite though is the garden restaurant for lunch. You not only get the usually beautiful views of the coastline, you also see beautiful valley views



Of course, as usual, you pay for the view, and the menu is kind of small, but lovely.

You can also wander around toward the infinity pool – there is a small restaurant there as well.

### *Ristorante Torre Normanna, Maiori* <http://www.ristorantetorrenormanna.com/>

This restaurant is located along the coast just down the hill from Ravello. We had pretty much settled in to our favorite places, but Alex Ruocco suggested this place and it would have been a shame to miss it. It is located in one of the 13<sup>th</sup> century watchtowers along the coast that used to be used to warn the residents to flee into the hills if attackers were spotted coming in from the sea.

The dining room, in good weather, is open air and perched directly over the crashing waves, and the food is great too!



### *D'Amore, Capri* [http://www.damorecapri.com/?portal\\_referer\\_id=1](http://www.damorecapri.com/?portal_referer_id=1)



D'Amore is about a 5 minute walk down one of the narrow streets from the Piazza Umberto. Obviously there are a lot of options, including a number of places with better views, but when it is a really hot day, heading in to the shadier streets gives you a little relief, and the food is still great. Usually you will see young women walking up and down the street in front of you very stylishly dress in linen ensembles – it takes a bit to realize they are models for some of the local stores.

Le Arcate, Anacapri <https://www.caprifoodwine.com/it/ristorante>

This is the pizzeria we go to when we are staying in Anacapri – it's just about a 10 minute walk uphill from our hotel into the village, just past the main square. It can get pretty busy because the accommodate the tour busses, but if you go for a later lunch you will find mostly locals.



Trattoria il Solitario, Anacapri <http://www.ilsolitarioanacapri.com/>



You have to keep an eye out for the sign for this place – the sign is right on one of the main streets just off the piazza, but then you follow a narrow walkway back before you get to the restaurant itself. There are indoor and outdoor rooms, and we usually choose the covered open-air terrace. No view here, unless you count the vines and the cats, but it is good food and well-priced.

## **When to go**

Most places that cater to tourists on the Amalfi Coast and the nearby islands either shut down completely or cut back from about mid-October to mid-April, so it's important to check first.

This area gets pretty hot and humid, and it's hilly, and it's popular. August in particular gets a lot of European visitors (and did I mention it's hot?). We have gone in early June, July, August, and early September, and my favorite times were the second week in June and the second week in September. I would like to try the end of May or the first week in June, but I don't think I would go much past the second week in September – it can start to get rainy.€€

On that September trip, we had a tremendous thunderstorm the first day in Anacapri that blew up suddenly, and was over pretty quickly, but it took out the wi-fi for a couple of days. Even the four and five star hotels weren't immune – but maybe that is a luxury and not a problem.

## **Getting to There**

You can book a flight to Naples, which will mean connecting somewhere. From there, you can take a train to some places farther south along the coast, or get to the port and take a ferry to Sorrento and some of the other towns, or book a car.

We tend to take a direct red-eye to Rome. From there, you could also connect to Naples via air, or go into central Rome and take a train to Naples, etc. We've decided it's a worthwhile splurge to have a driver (see below) there to meet us at the Rome airport and take us directly to our place in Sorrento. It's about 2 ½ or 3 hours, you can sleep if you want, and even though it may cost something like 400€, the other options aren't free and they involve a lot of separate steps.

## **Getting Around There**

Sure, it's tempting to see all of those Vespas and other scooters and think that would be the perfect way to drive down the Amalfi Coast – go for it if you like. I'm here to tell you, though, it is not for the faint of heart and just because they can load four family members and a week's worth of groceries on one and weave through streets and around curves with no apparent lanes or traffic signals doesn't mean you have it in you.

Many people will rent a car if you are planning to cover a lot of ground through Italy, but we have already revealed ourselves to be lazier than that. Plus, there is the drinking of the wine with means.

And so, for us, the answer has been a lovely guy named Giuseppe (Peppe) Esposito, who will either drive you himself or send one of his equally lovely drivers, like Alex Ruocco with a super comfortable Mercedes or Mercedes van, so no matter how big your crowd is, you're good. Here's the web site: <https://www.positanotaxi.net/en/reviews>

## **What to buy**

Of course you can always buy **wine** in Italy, but I'm not going to lie, the whites in particular that are local to this region aren't great, in my opinion. The local reds are better, I don't have any particular favorite, but really any region can give you some good affordable options. This is the place in Sorrento that we typically go: The Corner Shop (<http://www.cornershopsorrento.com/en/>) Giovanni is the son of the family who works there – you may also see his sister and father. It's not the place to go and ask for a 5€ bottle, but they will have great, reasonable recommendations so if you need a case to keep at the villa or just a bottle to drink in the park, they are really nice people.

The alcohol that this area is really known for is **Limoncello**. Every little café (and everyone you meet) has their own version. Often you will get a complementary shot at the restaurants and cafes you visit. It's fun to compare and see how such a simple recipe can taste a little different every time.

Speaking of **Lemons**, lemon patterned and flavored things are everywhere. Sorrento lemons are bigger and uglier than the ones in U.S. supermarkets.

**Sandals**, available in lots of stalls and little shops and advertised as made to order are available everywhere for really reasonable prices (usually between about 30-75€ depending on the options you choose. Now, it turns out that made to order really can get you a sandal in your chosen style (from a menu) and color (from a menu), generally the same day. The only limitation seems to be that the available stock of soles only goes up to about a man's size 10 or 11, so the bigger guys like Ed are out of luck.

**Linen, Cashmere, Silk** – scarves, pants, shirts, for men, for women, lots and lots of linen. Just make sure to check the labels for this and any other clothing to make sure you are getting the Italian stuff and not something from India (unless you like it, then that's fine). For me, the cashmere and cashmere/silk scarves are especially good buys.



**Boxes** – what? Sorrento has a history of very skilled woodworkers, specializing in inlay work. For mean, that means boxes, though there are lots of other examples of the craft available. The traditional work is usually in florals or landscape scenes, but my preference is for geometric patterns, and I usually can't resist just one more that we buy here: <http://www.gargiulo-jannuzzi.it/main.htm>. There are lots of smaller artisans, this is a really big store, but I like the designs they stock, like this one:

## **Pit Stop - Rome**

I know it sounds ridiculous, but for us Rome is just a pit stop on our trips to the Amalfi Coast. We usually fly in on a red eye and head straight down the coast.

Our return usually departs about 9 a.m. local time, so most often we arrive from the south the day before, usually about 1 p.m., giving us just enough time for lunch, one tourist thing to do, and dinner.

We've stayed at the Intercontinental at the Spanish Steps (now closed) and at the St. Regis (using points), but the last couple of times we have stayed at Le Meridien Visconti

(<https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/rommd-le-meridien-visconti-rome/?scid=bb1a189a-fec3-4d19-a255-54ba596febe2>). The hotel has a nice rooftop bar where they often have live music and small plates.

It's in a mostly higher end residential neighborhood with good restaurants and you can walk pretty easily to the Vatican area and also across the river to the Piazza del Popolo.

Lunch is wherever.

We've been several times to dinner at this place, just off the Piazza del Popolo:

*La Buca di Ripetta* <http://www.labucadiripetta.com/roma/>



Yes, that is a baby blue Vespa in the dining room.