

Travel

CASTELLABATE CAMPANIA

Smart Neapolitans don't turn right for the Amalfi Coast, they head on south to Cilento National Park and the two-bit town of Castellabate. The old hall, on top of the hill, is a glorious medieval chest of winding lanes, tiny bougainvillea-lined piazzas and a crumbling 12th-century castle towering on the cliff edge, built by Abbot Costabile Genovese as protection against the Saracens. The bells of the building play five times a day.

Nine hundred and fifty feet below, by the bluest of seas, is the other hall, Santa Maria di Castellabate, a charming jumble of fishermen's cottages, noble palazzos, waterside bars and shops full of beach tat. In Sorrento without the big bucks, an old school seaside special.

Hook up with Ligi at the harbour to see this coast at its best: half a day on his catamaran takes in Oricola, the town's favourite spot (in July), the blustering baia di Agropoli and the postcard port of San Marco from £22pp; 00 39 325 200 9750. Landlubbers should join the cruise at Il Gaiellari for a day of sublime picnics from £1.50. Corso Sorrento Stefano Marazziti 45, then pitch a towel on one of the rocky slabs sticking out into the sea and relax.

You'll want fishing boots to tackle the three-mile sacred path up Monte Stella, starting from the church of San Nicola di Bari, in Stella Cilento, and rising 2,460ft to the sanctuary at the top. On the way, you'll have ultra-blue views of the marine reserve, and might even catch sight of the shy Cilento buffalo, source of the creamy mozzarella on your pizza.

Back in town, get a harbour-side seat within the 12th-century arches of Le Gatte to watch the sun set over Capri. If an Aperol spritz doesn't last long enough, stay for pizza, too – maritima is the pursuit. Choice from £7. Via Genaro Nasso 22. Or move over to Per Bacco for a tuna tartare and fritto misto feast from £10. Via Andrea Guglielmi 59.

Cilento has some of the most splendid ruins of the ancient world. Pastime: once known as Paestum – boasts three spectacular temples (£2, museum opens, then £10). www.international.com.

LA MORRA

LA MORRA Cut down a nebulous view in La Morra and, until not too long ago, you risked having your hand chopped off as punishment. Which just goes to show how seriously they take the Barolo grape round here.

It's hard to choose between the three big on five wine and Slow Food (the movement began in nearby Bra), but they're not shouting about La Morra from the red-dotted rooftops. Which means that, outside the summer hole, it can feel like there's someone in each (not even a dog) to be seen.

Meet the local growers if you want to understand what makes the region tick. Giovanni Corneo (corneo.it), Marcarini (marcarini.it) and Caccia Ballarín (cacciaballarini.com) all do tours and tastings, with Barolo, Dolcetto d'Ale and Barbera d'Aba on offer from £10pp.



If the crowds of Chiantishire leave you cold, try the remote hilltop towns and little seaside resorts the locals go to. *Mia Aimaro Ogden* is our woman on the inside



TELL US YOUR ITALIAN SECRETS AND WIN FREE FLIGHTS Do you know a perfect little town you'd be prepared to share? Or is there a hidden corner of Italy you think we should know about? Send your tips and tales to travel@thesundaytimes.co.uk and we'll publish a selection of your comments next week. The best letter will win its sender a pair of return flights with Monarch, see page 3 for details.

Forget the spitting nonsense and swallow all you like – you can walk home. The loveliest stroll is along the Sentiero del Grandi Orizonti (the Footpath of Wide Horizons), which is three miles of the bluest obvious. Don't miss the church of San Martino at the end. Its weathered exterior gives little clue to the village and Bovo, known to locals as bel Sidi for its excellent views. The high points of its four-course tasting menu are real tartare with parmesan and lobster beef in Barolo menu (£4, ristorantebovo.it).

For pizza under £8, pizzeria Perlecco.com, while Il Gelo produces exceptional farm food menus from £26, www.ilgelopizzeria.com. End the night with a grappa or two at Le Vigne (00 39 325 200 9750).

Stay Four generations of La Morra millers have lived in the sturdy farmhouse of Fior di Farne – they'll give you a tour of their working mill if you ask nicely. The rooms have chunky country-style furniture and wood-panelled ceilings, but be sure to request one away from the road. Breakfast is organic and abundant (double from £57, B&B, www.thefloridiane.com).

Fly To Turin with Ryanair; La Morra is an hour's drive south.

ASOLO

Imagine a place so chilled, they made it a verb: *asolar* is the art of hanging out. The post-Gosse Carducci called Asolo "the city of 100 horizons", and you should take in its many of them as possible on your secret weekend here. This place is a feast for the eyes: the 1,200-year-old hilltop town is an enclave of shady porticoes, medieval churches, fountain squares and frescoed loggias, surrounded by woods and backed by the mighty Dolomites.

A lot of hardware looting goes on here. But sit yourself and check out the architecture. A chunk of the province of Treviso's Strada dell'Architettura trail runs through the town's heart out of the scary naked carvings of Gino Longobardi, the tiny church of Santa Caterina, with its fading frescoes, and the convent of Sant'Anna, where the travel writer Freya Stark was buried in 1963. She looks out over Monte Grappa (tourism province treviso.it).

Ten minutes north of Povegliano, baroque in 1757 of the sculptor Antonio Canova, in the Museo Canova, you'll find casts of his 'Three Graces and Cupid and Psyche'. The ticket also gets you into Palladio's country Villa di Maser and the Museo Giorgione, where the Renaissance artist produced some of his greatest work (£5, museogiorgione.it).

The area's highest horizon of all, right out to Venice, 50 miles away, is from the 5,428m summit of Monte Grappa. Its monumental tomb for the fallen of the First World War, which holds the bodies of almost 23,000 Italian and Austro-Hungarian troops, is a moving tribute.

You can join the mountain-bike peloton on a steep, sweaty cycle to the top from Asolo from £14 a day from ViniVite, in Vittorio Veneto, or drive up to the Rifugio Andretta, park and hike the rest of the way. Pack a picnic of prosciutto and the local pinna friulana from Specchia Castromonte Friate (Via Roberto Browning 65, and stop off to taste the prosciutto appetizer at Tenuta Amada on the way down from 00 39 325 200 9750).

For the best aperitivo town, pull up a director's chair by the fountain at Caffè Centrale and ask a couple of strawberry-blond from £3, view.caffecentrale.com before sitting down to marinated sardines and guinea fowl at Ca' Verten (main from £7.50, Piazza Gabriele D'Annunzio 11). Or head down the road to Due Mori, where Stefano de Lorenzis is cooking his war to a Michelin star (main from £12, Piazza Gabriele D'Annunzio 5). After dinner, make your way to Henry's bar, under the loggia, for a nightclub with pumping Italian pop (Via Valcugana 200).

Stay Once the home of the poet Robert Browning, the Villa Cipriani has lush terraced gardens, a huge infinity pool and 29 rooms that ooze old-school class. Book a candlelit dinner in the grounds and watch Venice light up (double from £85, B&B, villa.ciprianiasolo.com).

Fly To Venice with easyJet, Asolo is an hour's slow drive northwest.

SANTO STEFANO DI SESSANIO

Four thousand feet up, in the shadow of Gran Sasso, the Apennine's highest peak, Santo Stefano is a village with its heart firmly in the Middle Ages. And that's just how visitors like it. If you don't fall hopelessly in love up here, we'll eat our shepherd's hat.

In the early 2000s, when its population had dwindled to just 100 souls, Santo Stefano's future looked bleak. Then along came the Milanesi maverick Daniele Biliotti on his shiny motorbike. He fell in love and bought a house. Then another, and another. In 2004, he opened his first *albergo diffuso*, or scattered hotel, and the village came back to life.

It's always had clout. Since pre-Roman times, Santo Stefano was a hotbed, that make up the Grutte di Stille (02 39 740 00 11).

might still catch a shepherd wandering round town, playing his peculiar bagpipes. The Medici left their mark, too. Their 16th-century tower was badly damaged in the earthquake of 2009, but its iron doorknob remains. There are plans to rebuild.

Now the village is all about keeping it real. Locals offer classes in traditional crafts: you can make bread and milk biscuits in a 16th-century oven, cook your own Abruzzese dinner using kilometre-zero ingredients, or learn to weave a scarf on an ancient loom (classes from £3, santostefanoantantio.it).

Head down to the River Trino for a canoe trip or from San Martino back up to the Capio d'Agnone spring, where you can jump up for a swim. In summer, there's an option to do it by night (from £48 for two, B&B, www.bnb.com). Or ride out through the Areno Valley to the mysterious caverns and waterfalls that make up the Grutte di Stille (02 39 740 00 11).

Back in Santo Stefano, have dinner at Locanda Sott' di Archi. The furniture, plates and mugs are all handcrafted, ingredients are locally grown and the dishes are based on historic recipes, which doesn't mean lentils with everything, but does mean excellent roast pork with apples. Sit on the cliff-edge terrace (main from £22, santostefanoantantio.it). For a quick

snack, Alimentaria Enoteca Montana offers local meats and cheeses – don't miss the pecorino plates from £2. Via De Contrà 10. Or try the *aperitivo* (a hybrid of *aperitivo* and *dinner*) at Olyna, on the square (from £3, Piazza Medina 20).

Stay They might be big on historical authenticity in Santo Stefano's 29 rooms, but you won't be living like a pauper. The furniture is elegant, the beautiful linen and blankets are all hand-made – and there is running water in the sculptural bathroom (double from £123, B&B, santostefanoantantio.it).

Fly To Rome Campino with Ryanair; Santo Stefano is just under two hours northwest by car. You might want to take longer, though – the roads are pretty poor.

OTRANTO

PUGLIA The face Otranto (that's Otranto, not Otranto, thanks) presents to the world today is one of charming linearised buildings curving along a vast sea wall, an Argosian castle you can replicate in sand. Choose silver beaches, Calote Blue surf and the sound of chubby children demanding their third plate of the day. Your typical Puglian seaside town doesn't come more perfect than this.

It wasn't always like this: the town's bloody history includes five breathing dragons, a fleet of murderous Ottomans, the wrath of Argosian castle you can replicate in sand. Choose silver beaches, Calote Blue surf and the sound of chubby children demanding their third plate of the day. Your typical Puglian seaside town doesn't come more perfect than this.

The town straddles an inlet, but it's worth driving 40 minutes up the road to the Blauer Baa der Türkei, where, any time outside August, it's just you and the monks queuing for a shot of the best local espresso (£1 can buy Posidonia, by the castle, will pack you up a parcel of Puglian snacks for your picnic (main from £3.50, Via Papa Costantino 15).

Make sure you're back in time for the passeggiata. Seaside is a bit best, showing off their tans, crack wedges and superhero threads along the lungomare as the sun dips into the sea. The best ice cream is from Gelateria Casavari: its yoghurt, honey and nut is a thing of beauty (from £2, Largo Canova 8). If you can work in a spirit at Luni Spumare, all the better (from £16, Via Bastione Pelagi 12).

Pop into Otranto's great cathedral to gawp at the huge Tree of Life mosaic on the floor. Nobody really knows what this Old Testament mythical monster masterpiece of 1610 is all about, but it adds a whole other level of oddness to the altar backed by 800 martyr bones.

If you're an appetite after that, La Rotonda is the place to go: try the sea urchin carbonara, with pizza chiostrato a mouse for after (main from £13, labrotonda.com). For a nibble, 1910 minto, grab a table on the terrace at Il Castello (from £11, Piazza Canova). And in the morning, get up in time to catch the little man in an ape van near Banco di Napoli for a real good jumping frog – years for less than £2.

Stay At the farmstead of Masestra Panaro, the Forza family have created not only an elegant haven of 18 rooms but a top-notch restaurant, too (double from £55, B&B, masestrapanaro.com).

Fly To Brindisi with Ryanair; Otranto is an hour's drive southeast.

Mia Aimaro Ogden was a guest of Villa Cipriani, Palazzo Belmonte, and, which flies to Venice and Naples (easyjet.com), and International Rail, which can book tickets for train journeys across Italy.

HEARD IT ON THE GRAPEVINE Main picture, La Morra rises above Barolo wine country. Above, aperitivo in Asolo and dinner on the harbour wall in Otranto



BENNI IN THE DUGOUT The big City gambler and his £1m win

Seconds out King Kong nearly to knockouts as he wins £1m



Medical aids 'spy on doctors'

Court could sentence also 'killing peace' for the use of medical aids in the war in Syria

SPOTTED AT THE DURBAN JULY



BIG SIZE STORY Zwane gets special capital treatment

INSIDE Another round of questions: the growing threat for probiotics

RANINI MUNI SAMI delivers an anti-racism message

FIRST THEY CAME FOR PETER BRUCE Who's next?

Vote as ANC orders, MPs told

ANC leaders have ordered MPs to vote as they see fit in the upcoming general election, a move that has caused controversy. The ANC has been accused of being a 'vote-buying machine' and of using its influence to ensure that its MPs vote in a certain way. The ANC has also been accused of using its influence to ensure that its MPs vote in a certain way. The ANC has also been accused of using its influence to ensure that its MPs vote in a certain way.

Women's league boosts marshallings

The Women's League has announced that it will be boosting its marshallings for the upcoming general election. The league has been accused of being a 'vote-buying machine' and of using its influence to ensure that its MPs vote in a certain way. The league has also been accused of using its influence to ensure that its MPs vote in a certain way.