

TRAVELAGE

EXPLORING TRAVEL FAVORITES AND FRONTIERS

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fave five things to do in naples

Writer Maryann Hammers takes us through Napoli for a slice of Italian living

By Maryann Hammers



A hike up Mt. Vesuvius, seen here in the distance, is a must for visitors to Naples thanks to its gorgeous views and affordable admission rates.

Naples may not have Florence's cache, Venice's canals or Rome's Coliseum, but this charmingly chaotic metropolis immerses visitors into a true, lived-in Italian city. More than any place I've visited, Naples simultaneously summons and assaults all of our senses in a passionate collision of life.

In the historic center, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it's easy to get lost amidst ridiculously narrow streets and alleys. Pizzerias, wine shops, panini stands, gelaterias, and espresso cafes are at street level. Upstairs, green-painted apartment shutters are flung open, their balconies spilling over with red geraniums and laundry hung out to dry.

I had been warned about pickpockets, and a constant cacophony of roaring scooters and car horns made me nervous, but where else can you sit in a piazza, surrounded by ancient monuments, and watch small boys bounce soccer balls against the sculpted marble foot of a saint? At a tiny two-table cafe — just steps away from the 16th century San Paolo Maggiore Basilica — \$1.50 bought me a small, impossibly delicious tomato-mozzarella pizza, and the owner offered a bowl of slushy, cold fragole (strawberries) that burst in my mouth with sweet freshness.

And speaking of assaulting our senses, now is an ideal time to visit Naples, especially since its garbage strike is over. Here are seven different ways to enjoy Naples and its surroundings:

1. Hike Up Mt. Vesuvius.

As Europe's last active volcano, this mountaintop forms Naples's lovely backdrop. Here, visitors can walk up the trail and along the ridge, gaze into the crater, enjoy panoramic views and even buy a bottle of Mt. Vesuvius wine for about \$7. (Thanks to the lava flow, the fertile soil is perfect for grape-growing.) Warn your clients to bring a jacket, though; it's windy on the top. Admission to the park is about \$10 for adults and about \$7 for students age 18 and under.

Vesuvius National Park

www.vesuviopark.it/grancono/index.asp

2. Sample the Nightlife.

It seems everyone in Naples parties in Mergellina, a harborfront neighborhood packed with sidewalk cafes, bars and coffee houses. Located about a mile from the main port, the streets here are jammed with traffic even at 1 a.m. (which makes sense, since most Neapolitans don't have dinner until 11 p.m. or so). The area is equally popular with locals on Sunday afternoons. Our guide told us that locals use the "weakest, smallest sliver of sunshine" as an excuse for a gelato in Mergellina.

3. Eat pizza.

If your clients do nothing else in Naples, they must eat pizza, for here is where it was born. Pizza Margherita was invented at Pizzeria Brandi. Established in 1780, this picturesque establishment, located on a tiny cobblestone street just off Via Chiaia, still draws a crowd. Other notable pizzerias include Da Michele, a local hit now famous thanks to the book *Eat, Pray, Love*. Our group's favorite was the fun and colorful Pizzeria Europeo di Mattozzi, an all-around great restaurant, full of Italian comfort food.

Da Michele

www.damichele.net

Pizzeria Brandi

www.brandi.it

Pizzeria Europeo di Mattozzi

www.europeomattozzi.it

4. Go to the Farm.

For the freshest olive oil, homemade pasta, and just-picked vegetables, visit Casa Scola, a family farm in the medieval grain- and grape-growing village of Castello, a few miles outside Naples. Shaded by olive groves, surrounded by vineyards and famous for Gragnano wine and pasta, it makes for a picturesque lunchtime spot. Olive oil and wine are also available for purchase.

Casa Scola

www.casascola.it

5. Wander Around Town.

Bright red, double-decker, hop-on/hop-off City Sightseeing buses stop at many historic, artistic and cultural points of interest, but the best way to experience Naples is on foot — just beware roaring scooters darting every which way and look out for maniac drivers. Bustling Via Toledo offers a complete immersion into noisy Neapolitan life, while the posh Chiaia neighborhood is known for designer boutiques. Funiculars — as celebrated in the popular Italian folk song, “Funiculi, Funicula,” run between downtown and fashionable hilltop neighborhoods, allowing clients to avoid a steep walk.

City Sightseeing Buses

www.napoli.city-sightseeing.it/eng