

Sophia Loren on a film set in Sorrento

in good campania

This southern Italian region is a food lovers' haven, writes Jan Fuscoe.

In his book *Siren Land*, the writer Norman Douglas vividly described how the currents of the Mediterranean Sea were inexplicably drawn to Campania, the sheltered region south of Rome. Incorporating the Amalfi and Sorrentine coastlines and the islands of glamorous Capri, verdant Ischia, sleepy Procida and the nature reserve of Capo Miseno, it was a region so loved by the Romans that they named it *Campania felix* or "happy country".

The reasons are simple. Long, hot sunny days, fertile soil and freshness. Much of the food on your plate comes from the region, with Italian certification of provenance. The DOP status - Denominazione di Origine Protetta, or "Protected Designation of Origin" - refers to the place where the product is made so, for instance, Mozzarella di Bufala Campana must be made from the milk of the

water buffalo that graze in the lowlands around Salerno. Even pizza margherita is a DOP product, meaning it must be made with Tipo 00 flour, buffalo mozzarella DOP and Italian tomatoes, cooked in a wood-fired oven.

Some of the finest food in the world can be found here, and there are 27 Michelin-starred restaurants in the region to prove it. But, happily, there are also plenty of trattorie that will provide you with a plate of simple but delicious fare. There's bountiful fresh seafood from the Amalfi Coast, fine fruit and vegetables grown on the slopes of lava-rich Vesuvius, handmade pastas from Gragnano, lemons from Procida, Capri and Sorrento, oil from Salerno, cheeses from the Lattari Mountains, and then there are the desserts and the coffee... all washed down with fine wines, made from grapes, such as aglianico, only found in this region.

SORRENTINE PENINSULA

Citrus and olive trees, thornless artichokes, fresh cheeses and traditional pasta factories abound here, so there are plenty of restaurants serving authentic dishes such as cannelloni with ricotta or the famous gnocchi alla sorrentina (gnocchi in a mozzarella and tomato sauce), as well as a handful of haute cuisine options too.

DA FRANCO

With bench seating and decor limited to the hams hanging from the rafters, this place is all about the pizza. Start with the ubiquitous margherita (tomato and mozzarella) and add toppings such as eggplant, mushroom or cured ham.

Corso Italia, 265, Sorrento, 80067, ph: 081-877 2066

BAGNI DELFINO

Sophia Loren reputedly lunched down at Sorrento's seafront Marina Grande



(the smaller of the two marinas) when she was filming *Scandal in Sorrento*. "Everything you see, I owe to spaghetti," the Neapolitan screen goddess famously once said, so perhaps she opted for spaghetti alle vongole (with clams) - just one of the options at mid-priced Bagni Delfino. The long, narrow restaurant offers panoramic sea views and a bathing platform with sunbeds for a post-prandial dip/bathe. **Via Marina Grande, 216, Sorrento, 80067, ph: 081-878 2038**

LO SCOGLIO

This family-owned trattoria in Marina del Cantone, close to Sorrento, sits on stilts above the sea and the views are stunning. A typical starter consists of a dozen vegetables grown at owner Tommaso's nearby farm, including the Piennolo tomatoes hanging from the rafters, simply prepared, followed by the house speciality of spaghetti with zucchini, lobster linguine and a seriously good baba (the famous Neapolitan dessert - see Sean Connolly's version on page 104). Signors Spielberg and Springsteen have been spotted here.

Piazza Delle Sirene, 15, Massa Lubrense, 80061, ph: 081-808 1026, hotelloscoglio.com



Clockwise from above: the region's lemons are among Italy's best; the ubiquitous pizza margherita; Da Franco; spaghetti alle vongole



DON ALFONSO

Believing that "great cooking is made in the field", Ernesto Iaccarino was a forerunner in promoting organic food and incorporates produce from his farm in the verdant Punta Campanella - artichokes, salads, home-cured meats - into his two-Michelin-starred creative menu, such as Rigatoni Vesuviana - a cone of rigatoni tubes topped with a tomato "lava flow" and a drizzle of basil sauce. For those tempted by the idea of more great cooking the following day, there are six lovely rooms.

1890 Corso Sant'Agata, 11, Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi, ph: 081-878 0026, donalfonso.com

IL BUCO

Housed in the wine cellars of an old monastery, this Michelin-starred restaurant is creative cooking at its best: amuse-bouches of little sfogliatelle (a typical Neapolitan pastry) filled with scarola (local greens)

and a "doughnut" of deep-fried creamed cheesy potato filled with tomato "jam" are a clue to the standard of gastronomy here. There's a tasting menu too and an extensive wine list. **2a Rampa Marina Piccola, 5, ph: 081-878 2354, ilbucoristorante.it**

I GIARDINI DI CATALDO

The lemon liqueur limoncello is made from Sorrento's famous lemons and can be sampled here. Tours of the nearby lemon grove and the tiny two-person "factory" where the limoncello is made are also offered.

Via Correale, 27, Sorrento, 80067, ph: 081-878 1888, igiardinidicataldo.it



CAPRI

Eating can be expensive on this top-destination island, especially around the Piazzetta, so it pays to choose your restaurant carefully. Famous for the caprese salad (mozzarella, tomato, basil and olive oil), delicious torta caprese (almond and chocolate cake) and excellent seafood, Capri also has its own limoncello and DOC wines.

É DIVINO

In a quiet side street of Capri lies this quirky wine bar. There's a small front restaurant, styled like your cool granny's sitting room, with a little garden and a larger music-filled area out back for lounging among eclectic. As well as bruschetta and crostini, you'll be offered a short but well-executed menu – perhaps a steak or seafood pasta – and a clutch of well-chosen wines at very reasonable prices. Almost unheard of in Capri.

Vico Sella Orta, 10/a, Capri, 80073, ph: 081-837 8364, edivinocapri.com

Clockwise from above: Capri; Il Riccio's room of desserts; the town of Minori; fishing is a big part of life in Amalfi

IL RICCIO

Arrive at this cliff-side blue-and-white Michelin-starred restaurant by boat, if you can; situated above the Blue Grotto and with views over the sea, it's wonderfully romantic. The fish counter, heaving with octopus, cuttlefish, bream and lobster, leaves no doubt about the speciality here, but you have to experience dessert too – there's an entire roomful to choose from.

Via Gradola 4/6, Loc. Grotta



Azzurra, Anacapri, 80071, ph: 081-837 1380, capripalace.com/en/restaurants-and-bar/restaurant-riccio

AMALFI COAST

Along with winding hairpin bends and breathtakingly beautiful sea views, the Amalfi Coast is renowned for its fish, including cocchio (white fish), scorpion fish, monkfish, moray and grey mullet. In particular, the little town of Cetara has one of the most important fleets in the Mediterranean and is famous for its anchovies.

AMALFI

The town of Amalfi lies on the seafront and is part of what was once known as the Valle dei Mulini (Valley of the Mills), thanks to the stream that once powered the town's paper mill, now a museum.

DA GEMMA

In spite of its fame (it was one of Graham Greene's favourites), it is possible to

eat very well at Da Gemma for not too much money. The restaurant lies on the main street, with a balcony from which you can watch the hordes while tucking into the recommended lemon risotto and signature paccheri – a traditional Neapolitan pasta in the shape of giant round tubes. The name comes from the ancient Greek (the first settlers), meaning “all” and “hand”, and still means “an open-handed slap” in Neapolitan dialect. The zuppa di pesce (fish soup), made to an original 1872 recipe, is exquisite. The restaurant also offers a tasting menu. **Via fra Gerardo Sasso, 11, Amalfi, 84011, ph: 089-871 345, trattoriadagemma.com**

TAVERNA BUONVICINO
Tucked up a side alley off Amalfi's main street, you'll find this relaxed but excellent restaurant with tables set out in the courtyard. It specialises

in seafood – try the octopus salad, catch of the day or a seafood pasta. The set menus are a true bargain.

Largo S Maria Maggiore, 1-3, ph: 089-873 6385, tavernabuonvicino.it

MINORI

Along the Amalfi Coast, just a few kilometres from Amalfi, lies the little sea town of Minori, taking its name from the ancient Latin name Rheggina Minor, referring to the river Rheggina, which still runs through it.

VILLA MARIA AGRITURISMO

At the top of a very steep hill, this little agriturismo (farmhouse B&B) offers good value and exceptional food. Vincenzo and Maria are wonderful hosts and everything placed before you has been grown or reared on Vincenzo's farm: cured meats from his pigs, cheese, home-made pasta, preserves, even limoncello and wine. Simple rooms with little terraces overlooking the land and sea beyond are available.

Via Pioppi snc, Minori, 84010, ph: 089-877 197, agriturismovillamaria.it

FURORE

A few kilometres in the opposite direction, is the hilltop town of Furore. Its name, from the Latin

for “raging”, refers to the stream that used to power the paper mills that abounded in the area.

MARISA CUOMO

Marisa Cuomo's vineyards lie on steep terraced slopes overlooking the sea. Her award-winning wines are made from classic grape varieties of the DOC zone: falanghina and biancolella for the white and per'e palummo and aglianico for the red. Take a tour of the cellars and vineyards, and then be accompanied to a restaurant near the estate for a tasting lunch. Booking is compulsory.

Via G.B. Lama, 16/18, 84010 Furore, ph: 338-921 3237, marisacuomo.com/en/1034/tastings.htm

PROCIDA & ISCHIA

Ischia was once known as Aenaria, “land of wine”, and its volcanic soil means that the cultivation of vines is historic. The famous sweet, thick-skinned Procida lemons, weighing up to half a kilo, are used in salads with mint, garlic and chilli. Don't miss the wine ice-cream at Procida's wine festival in November.

Below: Furore's Marisa Cuomo vineyard overlooks the Mediterranean Sea
Above: the island of Procida



UN ATTIMO DIVINO

Chef Raimondo Triolo's enoteca gastronomica promises simple, seasonal food expertly prepared: octopus salad with crisp vegetables, fish cooked in a salt “coat”, fillet with potatoes cooked in aglianico wine, and desserts, such as house-made cheesecake, to finish. The menu boasts more than 700 wines, many of them lining the walls. **Via Porto, 103, Ischia, ph: 081-1936 8069**

POMPEII & VESUVIUS

Roman playwright Plautus referred to the ancient Pompeians as “grass eaters” because they grew vegetables and pulses in abundance, and Pliny mentioned the fertile soil and grapes of the region. Falanghina del Vesuvio, coda di volpe and piedirosso del Vesuvio grapes

are grown here (used to make Lacryma Christi wine). The “Tears of Christ” is believed to have been drunk by the Romans and is mentioned in many literary works including Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* and Voltaire's *Candide*.

CANTINA DEL VESUVIO

A good place to start with your wine is at the source. Here, after a quick scoot around the vineyards on the slope of Vesuvius where white fiano and red Lacryma Christi wines are produced, you can enjoy a simple but delicious lunch: typical cheese and meat, followed by simple spaghetti with fresh tomato sauce, and Neapolitan desserts, as well as wine tastings, of course. **Via T della Guardia, 18, Trecase, cantinadelvesuvio.it ☺**

