

Sailing the Amalfi Coast

Overview: a cruise between Amalfi and Ponza is like time spent suspended in a movie on the 50s. Here you can still find real Mediterranean villages like Procida, stunning architecture from the times of Augustus to those of Niemayer and shouting fishmongers where prawns still move...



The top places to visit: Amalfi coast and Positano, Capri and Ischia, Pontine Islands and probably the top spot is the Roman harbour in Ventotene

Prices from: 100 euros per person per day

Our rating:

Wind and Sea: easy.

Kids friendly: yes

Lifestyle: history and nightlife

Gourmet: top

Mileage (approx) : 80-100

Cruise length: 1 weeks

When to go: june to october

Harbours and marinas: African organization, a local skipper is highly recommended

Gourmet and restaurants: hard to beat

Our top 3 SAILPRO anchorages

1. Chiaia di Luna in Ponza
2. Corricella in Procida
3. Ischia castello

History and art : the highlights of the area are endless, and certain are not to be missed: Amalfi catedral and cloister, Augustus Villa in Capri, the Roman Harbour in Ventotene and the villages of Positano, Ponza and Procida.

General. We stress the fact that Italian law requires harbours and marinas to leave a minimum number of transit berths. Unfortunately this law is never enforced and to expect free kindness, water and sometimes even diesel is not easy. Big commercial harbours (Formia, Naples and Salerno) and some of the smaller ones DO have some FREE berths for visiting boats, and the port captains (COMPAMARE) are sometimes helpful, especially in contacted in the correct manner by radio using the appropriate codes.

Even better using the English language (it puts them off balance and they are kinder). The local population in the area is amazingly friendly in most cases, and this is true for fishermen, coast guard officers, and locals in general. Unfortunately this is not the case for people connected with yachts. Water can be hard to come by. Expect fishy kindness when you pay outrageously for mooring, but if you claim your rights as a sailor to use transit berths and water, expect unkindness and even aggressive behaviour. In case you claim a transit berth via official channels and they force the mooring people to give it to you, do not leave the vessel alone

Weather: the area is right open to strong NW and SW winds and swell that must be expected at any time of the year. July is usually very calm. August can be tricky. Due to the lack of both, natural harbours and infrastructures, the weather (ch. 68, Italian and English) and the barometer should be monitored frequently. The only all around safe places, easy to enter even at night, are: Circeo (US military base, beware), Formia, Ischia Porto and Casamicciola (if you really have to), Porto Miseno, Napoli and Salerno. Night access and shelter from Northwest gales can be easily expected also at: Ponza, Ischia Ponte (S of the Castle), Procida-Corricella. Southerly gales are tougher to get shelter from: Ventotene harbour and Ponza E side. Easterly gales are rare. Anchorage is not abundant and rarely with good holding. Good at Ponza and Porto Miseno (sand and mud). Tricky anywhere else. Seasons: go there in June or September.

Ponza stands deservedly high in the list of the most beautiful islands of the planet. The village is close to perfection, some restaurants are genuinely good, and the beaches are stunning and the scenery awesome. Unfortunately things get a little worse when it comes to practicalities. Shelter is rarely good and nowhere complete, the hydrofoil captains should be shot, some restaurant owners hanged, the 'marina' owners skinned alive and the port captain jailed. The incredible 'Chiaia di Luna' cove, open to the west, is just amazing, with its sheer white cliffs, turquoise water, horseshoe shape and white sand. Unfortunately some brainless idiot among the authorities noticed that the cliffs could lose stones and decided to build a huge chicken wire to prevent other idiots to be hit. Moreover they closed the tunnel linking the beach and the town (built by the Romans around 2500 years ago and still working), thus preventing a good cook to reach the market and especially the very good fishmonger right by the ferry terminal. When this cove is uncomfortable, turn around the island and let go along the east coast, possibly far away from the town if you want to sleep in silence. Forget to ask for water to the seasonal pontoons by the town. Their prices are outrageous, their kindness very limited and their seamanship debatable. Good places to shop in town, but check the prices well. Go for the old ladies. At the right entrance of the harbour, 50 metres from the ferry terminal, there is an honest old lady with a grocery store. Right on top of her store, where the higher street enters the village, NW bound, W side, there is a tiny family restaurant that deserves a mention in the logbook, as does the fishmonger. The island of Palmarola, 3 miles W of Ponza, is a natural marvel and a NP. A must do day sail. Anchorages in the SE 40°55'38.08"N, 12°51'27.12"E

Ventotene is another amazing jewel where the admiration for the ancient Romans who built with little more than hammers a perfectly sheltered harbour, still in use, is counterbalanced by the pure awe for the double-barrelled idiocy of the modern genius who designed the new harbour, open right to the NW. This amazing engineering feat works like an amplifier for waves. These enter freely to pester the poor yachtsmen who paid an outrageous sum for the use of the wharf to the local incompetent and amateur harbour crew. So you can either use the Roman harbour (around 100 a night, but with a decent master and crew), or anchor right inside the new harbour, sheltering your vessel as close as possible to the NW notch of the cove, if there is room, and with a line ashore if possible. The coast guard has not much ado, so they'll probably tell you that you are in the manoeuvring span of the ancient ferry coming in mid morning. Have fun. The best solution, of course, is to anchor outside the Roman harbour, weather permitting 40°47'40.45"N, 13°26'0.47"E. The village, the unique stairway and the magnificent squares are worth an expensive stop. Fish is scarce, meat have seen better days. Look for your food with care, especially in high season. The area E of Ventotene, marked by yellow buoys, is OFF LIMITS!!!!

Ischia is rightly famous for its spas, of which there is a vast choice around, for the fashionable village of Ischia Porto, Lacco Ameno and St. Angelo. Ischia Porto is the main harbour, looks that its piers are made of pure gold (at more than 100 euros a night for a 12 mts) and the hydrofoils barrel in criminally to raise a real tsunami. If you have

money, it's a magnificent place to stay, but remember that the old guys helping you with the lines are always unofficial, never to be tipped and seldom competent. There are several excellent food shops and fishmongers between Via Roma and Via Regina Elena. If you want to sleep quietly, anchor with decent shelter and good holding S of the bridge linking Ischia Ponte and the magnificent Aragorn Castle 40°43'47.02"N, 13°57'44.97"E. The north coast is not that attractive, although spa lovers might find solace in the historic hotels at Lacco Ameno. St. Angelo in the south coast is calmer, nicer and one can hop to sleep well in northerlies just off the small harbour. When you visit the island, go high. Avoid high season. There is a marina in Casamicciola, which combines both, price and lack of charm

Procida is smaller than both, Capri and Ischia, and its small villages still conserve a delightful charm, especially Corricella. The small village, just a neighbourhood of the only town basically, has a splendid tiny (and almost useless) haven and conveys that unique feeling of quiet southern villages where you really do see people around doing just social chit-chat. The bay in front of the village is wide, pleasant, with decent holding, well sheltered from the N and W, with just a rock in the middle (3 metres deep) and no ferries around to bother your stay 40°45'32.56"N, 14° 1'43.30"E. True, the local Sunday power boaters can be worse. But overall the island is a must, definitely to be preferred over Ischia in case of tight schedule.

Porto Miseno is less than 4 miles from Procida and provides the best shelter in the whole area, with some mooring buoys and some area for anchorage. A huge marina was impounded for mafia some time ago, and looks like a ghost harbour. If weather is bad, go there, and you'll be in a pond. Moreover, as you will notice while sailing in, the area is devoted to mussel farming and the final product can be found everywhere, is delicious.

Pozzuoli to Sorrento. The area is worth a page of its own, but I'd rather visit it from the land. Naples, Ercolano, Pompeii are probably worth a journey of their own. They are not, unfortunately, boater-friendly (to say the least...).

Capri is a place that one should really see. The island was Emperor Augustus' private estate and no one ever thought him an idiot for that choice. The ruins of his villa command a great view and deserve a visit. Overall, Capri is just a perfect place. Unfortunately, everyone thinks so, and the place is packed of both, peasants and rich celebrities. Outrageously expensive. The harbour is surprisingly the cheapest of the area, but to find a berth is a desperate enterprise. If they offer you a berth on the first pontoon, right by the entrance where the NW swell and, worse, the hundreds of hydrofoil-killers come in, refuse. Anchor outside or, if the wind is from the N, sail around this beautiful island and anchor by the Faraglioni in the S bight of Marina Piccola 40°32'32.48"N, 14°15'5.54"E. Bottomless and wide open, but ok in calm weather. No advice on restaurants or shops. There are simply too many tourists around to expect a fair bet. Just anchor safely, go ashore and walk around, leaving someone aboard if you want to enjoy the perfect alleys, rich villas, great cafes and commanding views. Most old timers agree that there is too much new money around. Well, that's the same everywhere!

Amalfi Coast is long, straight and steep, which usually means a spectacular place to visit from land and a nightmare for the sailor. And the rule is confirmed. Nature and the locals, including the authorities, make this a tough place for boats to visit. The only decent harbour is Amalfi, and there's expensive room for very few vessels. Just anchor off the coast and listen to the forecast. Due to the nature of the coast, you'll have the boat always in sight, at least. Also keep in mind that many places between the point and Amalfi, including the small islands off the coast, are OFF LIMITS, and the coast guard is not there to give advice but just to fine people. The places to see are of course Amalfi and Positano, although in the latter place you'll even find it difficult to leave the dinghy ashore, because the local boatmen despise independent sailors. There are tons of places to eat and drink, although not cheap at all. For a more interesting stop, make it to Salerno, a cheerful, charming and pleasant city. There are many excellent restaurants, pizzerias and taverns (try the Cipolla). The fishmongers and grocery stores are full of cheap and delicious stuff, great wine at low prices, great leather shops and so on... The harbour is a busy commercial hub, with a couple of ridiculously expensive marinas inside. You can either raft alongside one of the wharves with little traffic (the coast guard here minds its own business) or better still anchor right between the E breakwater and the beach, where you can swim as well. You save miles walking between the town and the harbour and the weather is usually calm. If it blows from the S, hop into the harbour and find yourself a suitable spot.