

The Best of Campania & the Amalfi Coast

Campania—the region that encompasses Naples and the Amalfi Coast—is, for many tourists, *terra incognita*. But for Italians, it is a place of myth. In fact, centuries before the rise of Rome, it was coveted by Greek settlers and other immigrants, and the ancient Romans may have valued this region more than all their far-flung possessions. In this chapter, we'll help you discover the best of the region by pointing you toward its major treasures.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Visiting Naples and its *Centro Antico*:** One of Italy's lesser-known art cities, Naples will surprise you with its stunning collection of exquisite frescoes, paintings, and sculptures, which cover its numerous monasteries, palaces, churches, and museums. From the early Greek settlers to modern times, Naples has been the most important harbor in the south of Italy. Kings and noble families have lavished art on the city as nowhere else in Italy except Rome, making Naples a competitor with Florence and Venice. A key stop for art lovers during the “Grand Tour,” Naples was later forgotten due to the complete abandonment of its monuments. But thanks to sustained efforts over the past 15 years, Naples is again experiencing a tourism boom. See “Exploring Naples” in chapter 4.
- **Arriving in Naples by Boat:** You don't have to book a transatlantic cruise to have this marvelous experience. While arriving in Naples by car can be nerve-racking, confusing, and hot, with most landmarks annoyingly out of view, gliding into the bay with a sea breeze behind you and the city spread out ahead can be magnificent. The majestic and somewhat ominous presence of Vesuvius looming over the bay makes it that much more dramatic. You can arrive by regular ferry from one of the islands or even from one of the other harbors in Campania, such as Salerno or Sorrento. We highly recommend arriving during the very early morning or in the evening when the sun is sinking below the horizon, bathing the city in gold and orange; this is when the view is most magical. Upon soaking in the sight, you'll instantly understand the motivation behind the old saying, “See Naples and die.” See “Getting There” in chapter 4.
- **Hiking the Ancient Paths of the Amalfi Coast:** Taking a stroll on one of the Amalfi Coast's footpaths—once the only means of communication between the region's towns—is the best way to soak in the intensity of this amazing seascape. No matter your level of fitness, you'll find a

stretch of path that's right for you. The region's main road—the famed Amalfi Drive—was built in 1840 and made the area more accessible, perhaps too much so. The old trails, on the other hand, are unique, and lead you through the Amalfi Coast missed by so many tourists. Trails come in all levels of difficulty, from flat stretches (such as the footpath from Amalfi to Atrani) to downhill ones (such as the footpath from Ravello to Minori) to more demanding ones (including the Sentiero degli Dei and the Via degli Incanti from Positano). See chapter 7.

- **Exploring Greek Ruins:** The first colony the Greeks established in Italy was Cuma, near Pozzuoli. From there, they expanded south to the rest of the Campanian coast. The heritage they left in Campania is immense—rivalled in Italy only by Sicily—and in a state of conservation seen only in Greece itself. This is *Magna Grecia*, where ancient Greece first spread its influence into Italy, setting the stage for what we call Western culture. In these temples and towns, you literally get the chance to walk in the footsteps of Plato and Aristotle's contemporaries. See chapters 4 and 10.

- **Eating Pizza Neapolitan Style:** For Neapolitans, there is no other “style” of pizza, because they invented it. Whether you prefer a simple pizza joint or an elaborate restaurant, you'll share the pride Neapolitans feel for their invention, now taken over by the whole planet. The decor may be simple and traditional (sometimes nonexistent), and you'll usually have a modest choice of toppings—only two at Da Michele, reputed to make the best pizza in Naples. Yet at whichever place you choose, the outcome will be tasty, satisfying, and distinctive, because in Naples, no two

pizzas are alike. See “Where to Dine” in chapter 4.

- **Shopping in Capri and Positano:**

The best exclusive shopping in the region can be found at these two famous and trendy resorts, which stock treasure troves of unique, handmade clothes and shoes. You can still find tailors in Positano and cobblers in both towns who will make you sandals or garments on the spot, while you wait—or, even better, while you go for a swim. See chapter 7 for addresses in Positano and chapter 8 for Capri.

- **Wandering through Ancient Roman Lanes:**

Walking among ancient ruins is romantic and sad, and even a little creepy at times. Campania affords you many opportunities to live this unique experience. Of all the sites in the region, Pompeii and Herculaneum are justly famous: Walking their streets gives you a particularly eerie feeling. At the center of the lanes' mesmeric attraction is the knowledge that their violent destruction and miraculous preservation both happened on one terrible day nearly two thousand years ago. And somehow it feels as it is *always* that day here. Imagination easily bridges the gap to the time when these rooms resounded with talk and laughter (or, for more morbid minds, screams and cries of terror). Yet the best sites in the region might be some of the lesser known, such as the magnificent Villa di Poppea in Oplontis with its wonderful frescoes, the Villa Arianna and the Villa di San Marco in Castellammare di Stabia, and the Villa Romana of Minori. See chapters 5, 7, and 10.

- **Listening to a Concert in a Medieval Cloister:** The unique blend of cultures operating in Campania gave birth to some of the most

Regions of Italy



splendid medieval cloisters ever built. Intertwined arches of Sicilian-Norman architecture are used here to support the loggias of delightful inner gardens where the sun, more often than not, is shining on fruit-laden citrus trees and ancient stone and tile work. During the summer, music

festivals are held in most coastal towns to take advantage of these magical spaces. The best of these medieval marvels are the Chiostro del Paradiso in Amalfi, the Villa Rufolo cloister in Ravello, and the cloister of San Francesco in Sorrento. See chapters 6 and 7.

2 The Best Ruins

- **The Temples of Paestum:** This site's complete set of walls and three temples are simply the best Greek ruins in existence outside Greece. One of the three temples—the grandiose **Temple of Neptune**, whose restoration was finished in 2004, is actually the best-preserved Greek temple in the world, along with the Theseion in Athens. We highly recommend timing your visit in spring or fall, when the roses are in bloom and the ruins are at their most romantic. The site is also stunning at dawn and sunset in any season, when the temples' surfaces glow golden in the sun. See chapter 9.
- **The Acropolis of Cuma:** The first Greek colony in Italy and a beacon of Greek culture, Cuma was built on one of the most picturesque promontories in Campania. In the once enchanting area of the Phlegrean Fields, where so many myths reside (the Cave of the Sybil, Lake Averno and the entrance to the underworld, and so on), Cuma offers a stunning panorama and atmospheric ruins. See "Phlegrean Fields" in chapter 4.
- **The Anfiteatro Campano:** The largest Roman amphitheater after the Colosseum, this splendid ruin offers a glimpse at ancient artistry in spite of the active pillage that occurred here from the 9th century onwards. On-site is the Museo dei Gladiatori, a permanent exhibit reconstructing the life of a gladiator; it is housed in a

building located on the probable site of Capua's Gladiator School—whose most famous graduate was Spartacus, the slave made famous by the 1960 Stanley Kubrick film. It is located in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, which occupies the grounds of Roman Capua, the city that Cicero considered second only to Rome in the whole ancient world. The area is rich in other noteworthy ruins, such as the splendid Mitreo (Temple to the Persian god Mithras), and museum collections. See chapter 10.

- **Pompeii and Herculaneum:** Will enough ever be said to describe these incredible sites? Even if you have already visited them in the past, new findings are reason enough for a return visit. The magnificent Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum was opened to the public for the first time in 2004; the Terme Suburbane in Pompeii was opened in 2002. The riches of the archaeological area are best complemented by a visit to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples (see below), to view its massive array of frescoes and mosaics from earlier excavations at both sites. See chapter 5.
- **Oplontis:** Also called the Villa of Poppea, these are the ruins of a splendid Roman villa—believed to be that of Nero's wife—with magnificent frescoes and decorations. Less known than other sites and often passed by hurried tourists who stop only in Pompeii or Herculaneum, this villa is

unique, not only for its state of conservation, but also because modern archaeology requires materials to be left *in situ*. The frescoes and statuary grant you a fuller experience of the Romans' daily lives. See chapter 5.

- **Trajan's Arch in Benevento:** This little-known and out-of-the-way find is the world's best-preserved example of an ancient Roman triumphal arch. Recently restored—it took 14 years of work before the arch was opened again to the public in 2001—it is a masterpiece of carving that depicts the deeds of the admired (and fairly benevolent) Roman Emperor Trajan. Careful cleaning has eliminated darker areas in the marble, making the reliefs much easier to read. Inside a little Longobard church nearby is a permanent exhibit on the arch, its restoration, and Roman life under Trajan. See chapter 10.
- **Pozzuoli:** The ruins of the ancient Roman town of Puteoli have been difficult to excavate since the busy modern town occupies exactly the same area as the original (much as Rome does). In the splendid frame of Pozzuoli's bay, you'll find an underground Pompeii—buried not by a volcanic explosion, but by sinking under unstable volcanic ground. The main attractions are the Rione Terra, with Roman streets and shops; the 1st-century Greco-Roman market (Serapeo); and the Roman amphitheater (Anfiteatro

Flavio), where musical performances are held during summer. See chapter 4.

- **The Underwater Archeological Park of Baia:** Due to subsiding ground, a large part of the ancient Roman town of Baia was submerged by the sea. Excavated and transformed into an archaeological park, it can now be visited with scuba equipment or—if you don't like to get wet—in a glass-bottomed boat. The itinerary leads you through the streets of the ancient town and inside its beautiful villas, now water-filled. This magical experience truly deserves the word *unique*. See "Pozzuoli & the Phlegrean Fields" in chapter 4.
- **Velia:** Overshadowed by Paestum and just a bit too far from Naples for a day trip, Velia was the site of an important Greek settlement started around 540 B.C. It gave birth to one of the most important philosophical schools of antiquity—the Eleatic school of Parmenides and Zeno. Velia is one of the only Greek archaeological sites showing remains not only of an acropolis with its ruined temples, but also of a lower town with some houses. Portions of the walls here date from the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. A stretch of the original Greek pavement climbs towards the town gate, the famous Porta Rosa. A highlight of the Roman period is the thermal baths. See chapter 9.

3 The Best Churches & Cathedrals

- **Casertavecchia Cathedral:** This medieval church is one of the most beautiful extant examples of Norman-Arab architecture, built with two colors of tufa stone and white marble, and dotted with strange human and animal figures. See chapter 10.
- **Naples's Duomo:** The most splendid of Naples's churches, and home of superb artwork, you'll find that the Duomo is three churches in one. The Cappella di San Gennaro is really a church in its own right, with a fantastic treasure on display in the attached museum. Santa Restituta, the original

6th-century church, contains a magnificent 4th-century baptistery. See chapter 4.

- **Complesso Monumentale di Santa Chiara:** Another star on the Neapolitan scene, this splendid church-cum-monastery holds splendid examples of 14th-century sculpture that escaped the tragic bombing of World War II. (Other parts of the massive structure were not so lucky but have been restored.) The spacious majolica cloister holds a plethora of mythological, pastoral, and whimsical scenes enchanting to behold in the open air. See chapter 4.
- **San Lorenzo Maggiore:** Originally built in the 6th century, this lesser-known church in Naples is famous for its literary guests: from Boccaccio, who met his darling Fiammetta here, to Francesco Petrarca and others. It holds splendid Renaissance masterpieces and a multilayered archaeological site, where you can descend like a time traveler through layers of buildings all the way down to a paleochristian basilica and the 1st-century Roman Macellum (Market). See chapter 4.
- **Chiesa della Santissima Annunziata:** This church is located in Minuto, one of the medieval hamlets of the township of Scala, which stretches along the cliffs of the Amalfi Coast. The church offers not only

some of the region's best examples of Romanesque architecture and beautiful 12th-century frescoes, but also a superb panorama. See chapter 7.

- **Duomo di Santa Maria Capua Vetere:** Dating originally from the 5th century, this beautiful paleochristian church has been redecorated in later centuries, but it contains artworks reaching back to Roman times (its columns and capitals), as well as examples of Renaissance frescoes and carvings. See chapter 10.
- **Sant'Angelo in Formis:** This is one of the most important Romanesque churches in the whole country. Its entire interior is graced with beautiful frescoes. The church's lovely setting is Mount Tifata, near Capua. See chapter 10.
- **Santa Sofia:** Dating back to the early Longobard kingdom in Benevento, this small medieval church is famous for its unique star-shaped floor plan and the integration of Longobard and Catholic symbols. See chapter 10.
- **Certosa di Padula (Carthusian Monastery of San Lorenzo):** Begun in the 14th century, this magnificent monastery—one of the largest in the world—is a baroque masterpiece, chock-full of art and architectural details. Off the beaten path, but only a short distance from Salerno, it is a destination not to be missed. See chapter 9.

4 The Best Castles & Palaces

- **Castel dell'Ovo:** The symbol of Naples and the most picturesque icon of the Naples waterfront, this castle is the city's oldest fortification—its foundation dates back to the 9th century B.C. Greek settlement. It is said to be built over a magic egg hidden by the poet-magician Virgil for the defense of the city (which will crumble

into ruin if the egg is destroyed). See chapter 4.

- **Reggia di Caserta:** The Versailles of Italy, this splendid royal palace was built by the famous architect Vanvitelli for the Bourbon kings in the 18th century. It holds fantastic works of art and the decorations—walls and floors included—are magnificent.

The Reggia is also justly famed for its massive Italian garden, one of the most beautiful in the world. See chapter 10.

- **Castel Nuovo (Maschio Angioino):** This 13th-century castle was the residence of Neapolitan kings until the 17th century. Although a fire in the 16th century destroyed its frescoes by Giotto, there is still enough in this majestic fortress to impress visitors. See chapter 4.
- **Palazzo Reale:** The beautiful Royal Palace of Naples dominates wide Piazza del Plebiscito with its neoclassical facade and statues of kings. Inside, you'll find a rich collection of art and decorations as well as a wonderful library. See chapter 4.

- **Castel Lauritano:** This ruined castle in Agerola, a town on the Amalfi Coast, is incredibly picturesque and offers extensive views over both the coast and the interior. See chapter 7.
- **Villa Rufolo:** This splendid villa in Ravello has been made famous by its terrace and gardens, which inspired Wagner to write some of his *Parsifal*, so moved was he by its vistas. Today, you can listen to concerts of Wagner's work in the same setting. See chapter 7.
- **Villa Cimbrone:** The second most famous villa in Ravello, also with a splendid panoramic terrace, the Villa Cimbrone has another attraction: It houses a small hotel and a restaurant, which was opened to the public in 2005. See chapter 7.

5 The Best Museums

- **Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte:** Created by the Bourbon kings, this picture gallery is one of the best in the world, holding paintings from the 13th century onwards. The catalogue looks like a book on art history, complete with all the famous names of Italian art and many members of the Flemish school. The regular special exhibits draw visitors from all over Italy, Europe, and the world. (The success of these special exhibits is such that you'll need advance reservations to get in, unless you don't mind standing in line for several hours.) See chapter 4.
- **Museo Archeologico Nazionale:** Even if you are only mildly interested in archaeology, you should not miss this unique museum, which holds the largest collection of ancient Roman artifacts in the world. Created in the 17th century—with original Roman mosaics re-used in the floors and statues incorporated in the facade decoration—this is where the best finds from Pompeii and other local sites

were placed on display. The huge quantity of frescoes, statuary, and precious objects has greatly benefited from a reorganization, which was finished in 2005. See chapter 4.

- **Museo Nazionale della Ceramica Duca di Martina:** Housed in the elegant Villa Floridiana up in Naples's Vomero neighborhood, this rich ceramic collection includes the most important assemblage of Capodimonte porcelain in the world. See chapter 4.
- **Museo Campano:** This museum in Capua has a tall order, as the repository of the history and culture of the whole Campania region. It does a great job, though, with its several collections, covering the whole ancient history of the area, from the Oscans (about 6th century B.C.) to the Renaissance. It has a magnificent collection of parchment and illuminated manuscripts. See chapter 10.
- **Museo del Duomo:** This museum in Salerno is not large, but it holds a number of invaluable masterpieces

ranging from Roman times to the Renaissance and baroque periods. It includes a unique collection of ivory carvings, a great picture gallery, and a rich collection of illuminated manuscripts. See chapter 9.

- **Museo del Sannio:** Housed in the atmospheric cloister of Santa Sofia in Benevento, this is a small but well-rounded collection of artifacts from local sites. It includes the largest collection of Egyptian art found at one Italian archaeological site, a local temple. See chapter 10.
- **Museo Irpino:** This modern museum displays a collection of artifacts found in the rich archaeological sites in the outlying region of Avellino. The objects date back into the distant past long before the Romans (or even the Greeks) came to the region—as far back as 4000 B.C. See chapter 10.
- **Museo Archeologico dei Campi Flegrei:** Housed in the picturesque Aragonese Castle of Baia, this is another great treasure trove of Roman and Greek art in the vicinity of Naples. See chapter 4.

6 The Best Swimming & Sunbathing Spots

- **Vico Equense:** This lesser-known resort town on the Sorrentine peninsula is blessed with several beaches—most of them small and hidden away inside picturesque coves—such as **Marina di Equa**, dominated by a powerful 17th-century tower. See chapter 6.
- **Punta del Capo:** This lovely beach near Sorrento under the cliffs has attracted visitors from time immemorial. Nearby, you'll find the ruins of a Roman villa and a small pool of water enclosed by rocks, known as the Bath of Queen Giovanna. See chapter 6.
- **Bay of Ieranto:** Part of the Marine Preserve of Punta Campanella, this unique fjord was almost lost to developers, who would have spoiled its beauty forever. When the light is just right at day's end, the clarity of the waters here creates the illusion of boats floating in mid-air. See chapter 6.
- **Grotta dello Smeraldo:** Although this grotto in the village of Conca dei Marini on the Amalfi Coast is usually visited by boat, it is also the destination of a scuba procession on Christmas night. The pretty beach can be visited anytime, however. See chapter 7.
- **Positano:** The most famous resort on the Amalfi Coast, Positano has several picturesque beaches—although they are hardly deserted. Besides the central **Spiaggia Grande** by the Marina, you'll find **Fornillo** to the west of town, and **La Porta**, **Ciamicello**, **Arienzo**, and **Laurito** to the east. See chapter 7.
- **Spiaggia di Citara:** This is the most scenic beach on the island of Ischia, near the little town of Forio. Besides the lovely scenery, there are several natural thermal springs. See chapter 8.
- **Marina di Paestum:** Greek temples are not the only reason to come to Paestum. The sandy beach here is one of the best in Italy, extending for miles along the clear blue sea. See chapter 9.
- **Baia della Calanca:** In beautiful Marina di Camerota, this is one of the nicest beaches in the Cilento, and is famed for its clear waters. See chapter 9.
- **Bagni di Tiberio:** This is the best of the rare and tiny beaches of Capri. As the name suggests, it lies near the ruins of one of Emperor Tiberius's notorious pleasure palaces. It is accessible by a rocky steep path or by boat. See chapter 8.

7 The Best Spas

- **Parco Termale Giardini Poseidon:** This is our favorite thermal spa. Located on beautiful Ischia, the Poseidon boasts scenic outdoor thermal pools from which you can enjoy great views and a variety of aesthetic and health treatments. See chapter 8.
- **Ischia Thermal Center:** In the small town of Ischia, this is one of the most modern spas on the island, where you can enjoy a variety of state-of-the-art modern services. See chapter 8.
- **Terme della Regina Isabella:** Among the most famous and elegant spas on Ischia, this historical establishment in exclusive Lacco Ameno offers state-of-the-art facilities. See chapter 8.
- **Castellammare di Stabia:** This pleasant seaside resort is blessed with 28 natural thermal springs which you can enjoy at one of the two public spas: the historical one built by the Bourbon kings or the modern establishment on the slopes of Mount Fauto. Both offer a wide range of services, from beauty and relaxation treatments to medical ones. See chapter 5.
- **Scrajo Terme:** At the beginning of the Sorrentine peninsula, just outside the pleasant resort town of In Vico Equense, you'll find this historic thermal establishment dating back to the 19th century. Stayovers are offered so that visitors can "take the waters" in style. See chapter 6.

8 The Best Vistas

- **Lungomare di Salerno:** Italy's best-kept secret may be the seaside promenade of laid-back Salerno. A splendid and completely pedestrian walkway lined with palm trees, it offers views encompassing the whole bay from Capri to Punta Licosa in the Cilento. See chapter 9.
- **Deserto:** From the terraces of this Carmelite hermitage near Sant'Agata dei Golfi, you can enjoy the famous, unique circular panorama encompassing both the Gulf of Naples with Sorrento and the islands, and the Gulf of Salerno with the Amalfi Coast. On a good day, you can see almost the whole region, from the Cilento—way off to the south of Paestum—to Capo Miseno, to the islands of Ischia and Procida, and to Capri. See chapter 6.
- **Belvedere dello Schiacccone:** This is the best lookout along the whole Amalfi Drive, located immediately west of Positano and accessible from the road; the views are indeed superb. See chapter 7.
- **Lake Fusaro:** In the once picturesque Phlegrean Fields, not far from Pozzuoli, this beautiful lake was chosen by the Bourbon kings as the site for the Casina Reale, a structural jewel designed by the architect Vanvitelli. Today, as back then, the Casina Reale commands royal views perfect for picture taking. See chapter 4.
- **Monte Cervati:** The highest peak of the Cilento massif, Cervati is famous for its beauty in summer—when it turns purple with lavender fields—and for the magnificent views from its top. See chapter 9.
- **Agropoli:** From the walls of the medieval citadel you can look down on vast stretches of coastline—a view that helped the Saracens hold onto Agropoli as the base for their incursions until they were finally dislodged in the 11th century. See chapter 9.

9 The Best Restaurants

- **Don Alfonso 1890:** This is one of the top Italian gourmet addresses and the best restaurant south of Naples, created and maintained by hosts Lidia and Alfonso Iaccarino. The restaurant, a member of the Relais & Châteaux association, has a luxurious decor and offers superb food made of ingredients mainly from the chefs' own organic farm. See chapter 6.
- **Oasi Olimpia Relais:** Competing for the title of best restaurant on the Sorrento peninsula with Don Alfonso, this is our favorite spot to eat in the area. It might not have the over-the-top elegance of Don Alfonso (though it's not a place to drop by in your bathing attire, either); it has a more down-to-earth atmosphere and an enthusiasm for homegrown food that we find irresistible. The alfresco dining under the arbor is a plus. See chapter 6.
- **Faro di Capo d'Orso:** Owned by a young, emerging chef—Rocco Iannone—the Faro (Lighthouse) is one of the culinary highlights of the Amalfi Coast, supplemented by a unique location that offers stunning views of this stretch of coast. See chapter 7.
- **Il San Pietro di Positano:** The restaurant of the famous hotel in Positano with the same name (see later in this chapter), Il San Pietro offers the fine cuisine of chef Alois Vanlangenacker—all based on ingredients from the hotel's own farm—and a delightfully romantic setting which is worth a visit all by itself. See chapter 7.
- **La Stanza del Gusto:** This small restaurant in Naples is the kingdom of Mario Avallone, chef and perfect host. The “Hall of Tastes,” as it might be called in English, is a wonderful world where only the best ingredients and most pleasurable associations—some based on traditional Neapolitan cuisine—are to be found. The decor is intimate and vaguely bohemian, serving as the perfect background for the chef's inventive dishes. The prix-fixe menu is an adventure more than a sampler, and the wine list is a tome. See chapter 4.
- **George's:** Located on the roof terrace of the Grand Hotel Parker's (see below), this is a truly elegant restaurant happily devoid of stuffiness or ostentation. There's no snobbery here, only the best that money can buy. Chef Baciòt brings together the ingredients of tasty and healthy dishes which marry tradition with nutrition. The service and surroundings are impeccable, and the wine list is among the best in Italy. See chapter 4.
- **La Cantinella:** This well-known restaurant proudly serves a classic version of traditional Neapolitan cuisine, with a large share of the menu dedicated to seafood. Make reservations well ahead, as it is very popular with local crowds. See chapter 4.
- **Relais Blu:** This newly opened restaurant-cum-small-hotel is a hot address on the Sorrento peninsula. The delightful manager/host will introduce you to the flavors of his beloved native peninsula, be it for pre-dinner drinks, which are served with creative nibbles based on local ingredients, or for a perfectly romantic dinner. High above the rocky coast overlooking Capri, the open-air terrace is spectacular. See chapter 6.

10 The Best Luxury Stays

- **Grand Hotel Parker's** (☎ 081-7612474): This is Naples's most romantic luxury hotel, competing with the Vesuvio (see below) for the title of best hotel in town. Housed in a magnificent Liberty-style building, it offers superb service, classy accommodations, and one of the best restaurants in the country (see earlier). See chapter 4.
- **Grand Hotel Vesuvio** (☎ 081-7640044): This is generally considered the best hotel in Naples, offering palatial accommodations and exquisite service. You will be pampered the moment you step through the doors. The turndown service includes fine small-batch signature chocolates, the linens are royalty class, and the sumptuous breakfast is served in the most panoramic room you can imagine, with views over the picturesque Castel dell'Ovo. The gourmet roof-restaurant is another plus. Every detail here is truly first-class. See chapter 4.
- **Hotel San Pietro Positano** (☎ 800-7352478): A member of the Relais & Châteaux group, this elegant hotel tops our list of favorite places to stay in the whole of Italy. You'll understand why as soon as you step inside. The kind and attentive service, the tastefully colorful furnishing details, the romantic views from their terraces—we love everything about this place. See chapter 7.
- **Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria** (☎ 081-8071044): This gorgeous hotel is the best in Sorrento, housed in what once was a palatial residence overlooking the sea. The antiques in the guest rooms, the picturesque terraces, and the service make this an ideal hotel, right in the center of town (with its own elevator down to a private beach). See chapter 6.
- **Hotel Santa Caterina** (☎ 089-871012): Amalfi's most luxurious hotel, on a cliff just out of town, this is where you'll want to come to be pampered away from the crowds—and to enjoy the hotel's beautiful private beach, swimming pool, and lush gardens. See chapter 7.
- **Hotel Le Sirenuse** (☎ 089-8750666): Competing for the title of best hotel in Positano with the San Pietro above, this gorgeous hotel is housed in a beautiful 18th-century villa overlooking the sea. It offers palatial accommodations and fine service. See chapter 7.
- **Grand Hotel Quisisana** (☎ 081-8370788): The glitziest resort on Capri, this luxury hotel provides its guests with splendid accommodations and exquisite service. The hotel's bar and restaurant are popular spots for visiting socialites, so it's worth stopping by just to enjoy the atmosphere. See chapter 8.
- **Capri Palace** (☎ 081-9780111): This is the best hotel on Capri, which naturally means elegance, breathtaking views, and deluxe furnishings in rooms decorated with artwork and antiques. The service is impeccable. See chapter 8.
- **Mezzatorre Resort & Spa** (☎ 081-986111): Taking its name from the 15th-century watchtower that houses part of the hotel, the Mezzatorre is the most splendid accommodation in Ischia. On its own secluded promontory off the exclusive town of Lacco Ameno and not far from Forio, it pampers its guests in perfect elegance and style. The views from the park and the swimming pool are breathtaking. See chapter 8.