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48 Hours In: Naples

Sample life in the shadow of Vesuvius this autumn with an eruption of stunning views, sumptuous cuisine and fascinating heritage.

By Imogen Haddon

Saturday, 23 October 2010

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Travel essentials

Why go now?

The chaotic, moped-tooting city of Naples adopts a relative calm in late autumn, with the heat turned down and the narrow streets freed up from the crowds of high summer. A festive highlight in Naples is the tradition of presepi (nativity scenes), so visit the street of artisans' studios on Via San Gregorio Armeno (1) to see crib-makers carving their kitsch in the run-up to Christmas.



APP/GETTY IMAGES

Stunning: The view of Naples' port from the Posillipo hill

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Touch down

You can fly to Naples from Gatwick on either easyJet (0871 244 2366; [easyjet.com](#)) or British Airways (0844 493 0787; [ba.com](#)), while easyJet also flies from Stansted. Capodichino airport is just 6km north-east of the city centre. The Alibus airport shuttle leaves every half-hour from outside the arrivals hall, with stops at Piazza Garibaldi (2), where the main railway station is located, on the way to Piazza del Municipio (3). The 45-minute journey costs €3. A taxi to the centre costs about €25; make sure you agree a price at the outset.

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Get your bearings

Naples covers a large, hilly area as it tumbles down towards the bay that takes its name, and can seem somewhat daunting at first. A useful seafront landmark is the Castel dell'Ovo (4), and the main thoroughfare is Via Toledo. In the east are the Centro Storico (historic centre), Spaccanapoli (literally "split Naples"), the university and ports. In the hills west of Via Toledo are the Quartieri Spagnoli and the upmarket residential area of Vomero.

Royal Naples and Monte Echia sit in the centre near the seafront with the leafy upmarket and trendy Chiaia to their west. Watching over the city from the north is Capodimonte. The most centrally located tourist office (00 39 081 551 2701; [inaples.it](#)) is at Piazza del Gesù Nuovo (5). It opens 9.30am-1.30pm and 2.30pm-6.30pm daily (9.30am-2pm on Sundays).

Check in

The newest hotel in town is the spa retreat the Romeo Hotel (6) at Via Cristoforo Colombo 45 (00 39 081 017 5001; [romeohotel.it](#)), right opposite the ferry port with views over the bay of Naples and Vesuvius. Its ultra-modern Italian-Japanese style might not be to everyone's taste, but the rooms are comfortable. Doubles start at €220, including breakfast.

More understated in style and with a great location for the Centro Storico is the recently renovated Hotel Palazzo Decumani (7) at Piazza Guistino Fortunato 8 (00 39 081 420 1379; [palazzodecumani.com](#)). The hotel is an early 20th-century palazzo with minimalist décor. Doubles start at €140, including breakfast.

For a budget option, try the Hotel Piazza Bellini (8) at Via San Maria di Costantinopoli (00 39 081 451732; [hotelpiazzabellini.com](#)). Located in a 16th-century mansion off the Piazza Bellini and set around a charming courtyard. Doubles start at a very reasonable €90, including breakfast.

Day one

Take a hike

Start at the Piazza del Gesù (5), home of the Basilica di Santa Chiara - a church that is, in this baroque city, almost Anglican in its austerity. Walk around to the back and enjoy the silence of the yellow-and-blue-tiled cloisters of the old monastery (9.30am-5.30pm daily, Sundays 9.30am-2pm; €5).

Continue past the charming Piazza San Domenico Maggiore (9). On your left in this tiny square you will see the Piazzetta Nilo, home to the statue of the river-god Nilo. Just on your right will be a homage to another god, ex-Napoli player Diego Maradona, who has a small shrine on the wall of Bar Nilo, complete with a bottle of his tears. Continue along the via San Biagio dei Librai and find stalls selling everything from garish religious icons to Pulcinella masks, giving this part of town a sinister edge. Nowhere is this macabre vibe felt more strongly than in the Ospedale delle Bambole (10) at Via San Biagio del Librai 81 (00 39 081 587 2274; [ospedaledellebambole.it](#)). Dismembered dolls and mannequins pile up waiting to be stitched back to full health. At the end of this street turn left up Via Duomo and then right along the Via dei Tribunali. Visit Caravaggio's masterpiece in chiaroscuro style The Seven Acts of Mercy in Pio Monte della Misericordia (11) at Via dei Tribunali 253 (00 39 081 44 69 44;

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in Pio Monte della Misericordia (11) at Via dei Tribunali 253 (00 39 081 44 69 44; piomontedellamisericordia.it; free; open 9am-2pm daily except Wednesday).

Lunch on the run

The best pizzerias are usually packed and you often have to take a ticket to wait for your place. The crowd outside Pizzeria Gino Sorbillo (12) at Via dei Tribunali 32 (00 39 081 44 66 43; accademiadellapizza.it) shows this is the Naples pizza king. Marble tables are crammed together over two floors, but the gigantic perfectly wood-fired pizzas followed by a semifreddo make up for the less glamorous décor and the wait.

Window shopping

Replicating Milan's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, the Galleria Umberto (13) is a late 19th-century cross-shaped arcade with a mosaic-and-marble floor, a glass roof and plenty of upmarket shops. From here, head for pedestrianised Via Chiaia, and pop into Tramonatano (14) at 149 (00 39 081 41 48 37; tramontano.it), which has been producing leather bags and goods since 1865.

Most shops in Naples close for lunch from 1-4pm, reopening until about 8pm.

An aperitif

Quench your thirst after cruising the shops of Chiaia at the nearby Enoteca Belledonne (15) at 18 Vico Belledonne a Chiaia (00 39 081 403 162). This cosy wine bar, with wall-to-wall wine racks, is a local favourite. Get there early for a seat on one of the wooden stools at the bar or decked around the wine barrel-cum-tables, and order a glass of chilled Greco di Tufo.

Dining with the locals

For a real "Napoli" experience, head to Trattoria Mangia e Bevi (16) at Via Sedile di Porto 92, in the university district of Naples. Sitting on communal tables amongst students and locals, let your new-found friends help you translate the set menu and jot down your choices on a pad for the waiter. The first course will include an industrial portion of pasta, while the second course will be a hearty meat-based dish, such as spicy beef with potatoes and peas. Try the peperoncino-spiked friarielli (local broccoli) and enjoy the crunchy casareccio bread. All this for just €5, drinks not included.

Alternatively, visit one of Naples' best-loved fish restaurants – though Da Dora (17) at Via Ferdinando Palasciano 30 (00 39 081 680 519), in the Chiaia district, is more like visiting someone's house. Tucked away in a steep, narrow lane just larger than an alleyway, it comprises two little rooms with white tiles and a nautical theme. A bib will be pinned to your front by the cheery staff before you tuck into the messy but delicious linguine alla Dora – with a lobster, prawns, mussels and tomato sauce.

Day two

Sunday morning: go to church

The city's cathedral, the Duomo (18) dominates the Centro Storico (00 39 081 44 90 97; duomodinaipoli.com); open 8am-1.30pm and 5pm-7.30pm on Sundays (8am-noon and 4.30pm-7pm on other days), admission €3.

Its oldest part, the Basilica di Santa Restituta, dates back to the fourth century and features frescoes of Christ, Gothic arches and mosaics, as well as an archaeological area with relics from Greek Neapolis. The cathedral proper was built at the end of the 13th century, with the 19th-century facade added after an earthquake destroyed the original. The relic of San Gennaro – two glass vials filled with his dried blood – is kept here in a chapel filled with bronze and silver statues.

Out to brunch

A Neapolitan speciality is sfogliatelle, a sweet pastry filled with ricotta cheese. Sit in the Gran Caffè Gambrinus (19) at Via Chiaia 1-2, order an espresso and a plate of pasticceria. Either sit outside and watch the world pass through the Piazza del Plebiscito or inside amidst the marble and chandeliers of Naples' oldest and most venerable café. Then admire the piazza's neo-classical copy of Rome's Pantheon, the Chiesa di San Francesco di Paola.

Alternatively, sip a coffee at one of the many bars beside the excavations of the fourth-century Greek walls in the bohemian and literary Piazza Bellini (20). As well as the bookish types, this is also the hangout area for the Mastiffs, the Napoli football club's hardcore supporters.

Cultural afternoon

Housed in the old university building, the Museo Archeologico Nazionale (21) (00 39 081 564 8941; archeona.arti.beniculturali.it) holds thousands of classical artefacts, many of which were recovered from Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae. Marvel at the Toro Farnese in Room XVI on the first floor and wonder how it was carved from a single block of marble.

Other highlights of the museum include the mosaics from Pompeii, including The Battle of Alexander against Darius in Room LXI on the mezzanine floor, although this is currently closed for renovation – due to reopen in November. The museum opens 9am-7pm daily except Tuesdays; €8.

Take a view

Climb to the terrace of MADRe (22), the Museo d'Arte contemporanea DonnaRegina, at Via Settembrini 79 (00 39 081 193 13 016; museomadre.it; open 10am-9pm daily except Tuesdays, to midnight at weekends, admission €7).

Your reward is a panoramic view across the rooftops of Naples. After that, explore the city's first museum of contemporary art, with works by Anish Kapoor, Rebecca Horn, Gilbert and George, and Damien Hirst.

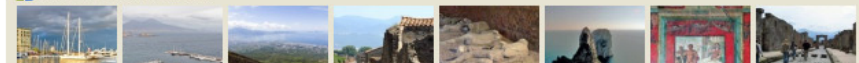
The icing on the cake

Tucked away in the Cappella Sansevero (23) at Via de Sanctis 19 (open 10am-5.40pm daily except Tuesday, Sunday to 1.10pm; €7) is the Cristo Velato (Veiled Christ) by Giuseppe Sanmartino. The detail of this chillingly realistic sculpture of Christ's corpse extends to seeing the slight indents from the holes in his nailed hands, all under the shroud that covers him.

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