

# SEE NAPLES ...AND WHY

**Daniel Bourke** finds passion, charm and energy aplenty in the Italian city, along with great cuisine and architecture

**Y**ou can see why Maradona chose Napoli. This energetic, edgy city was the perfect fit for the wayward genius – passionate, charming, fiery and just a little bit, well, shady.

As the documentary Diego Maradona, released in June shows, Naples worshipped Diego from the day he joined the club in 1984. Even today, there is barely a bustling street that doesn't have, among the instant pizza emporia and purveyors of perfect pastries, a mural of the sainted adopted son.

Directed by Oscar-winner Asif Kapadia (Senna, Amy), Diego Maradona, the movie, tells how the little prince took Napoli to title glory, went on four-day benders between games and even convinced the locals to support his Argentina side against Italy in the 1990 World Cup semi-final in the city's Estadio San Paolo (they won).

You can pay homage at an eccen-

tric shrine in Bar Nilo on Via San Biagio Dei Librai, which claims to have a lock of his hair and even a vial of his tears. For the full experience, get fleeced for an espresso inside.

If you want to catch a game, you can buy tickets from a box office in the beautiful Galleria Umberto I mall (take ID). The stadium is

easily accessible from the Campi Flegrei Metro station.

## Walking tour

On our first night, I took a walk to a famous coffee shop (Mexico, Piazza Dante) and can report that Naples at rush hour is the city I have ever seen. Cars, buses, pedestrians, a green man says to cross – but DON'T – there are six lanes of cars coming at you, and a young woman carrying her granny on a moped, and they're both on the phone.

The next morning we took a walking tour. Start, as we did, at the Piazza del Gesù Nuovo and pop inside the vast ornate church that gives the

square its name. From there, stroll the Spaccanapoli, the thoroughfare that splits the old town.

Sample those pastries (sfogliatella! pastiera!) but try to leave room for pizza. Literally any pizza place should rank in your top five this lifetime, but if you want a safe bet, try Trattoria Pizzeria Spaccanapoli. Napoli claims to be home of the pizza, and even specialises in a deep-fried version!

From there, head south, past lemon-soap smells and the ever-present chilli emblem jewellery. Eventually you'll get to the student enclave, where you can buy posters, books and more coffee.

## Volcanic eruptions

Down seemingly every alley is a towering old ornate building, teeming with life and people. Everywhere washing is hung out to dry. Everything, everyone is full of energy.

The city is cheeky to the point of rude but charming – every sharp move comes with a cheeky grin. Maybe this all comes from living in the shadow of



a potentially devastating explosion from the local active volcano.

The mood everywhere is Vesuvian – everyone is ready to fire off great

gobs of hot molten words, like when I jokingly accused our taxi driver of being a Juventus fan (oh boy) – but the lava soon cools. We were solid friends again moments later.

### Pompeii and ceremony

The most famous association with Vesuvius is, of course, Pompeii, the ancient Roman city frozen in time by volcanic ash in AD70. Now a Unesco World Heritage Site, it gets around 2.5 million visitors a year (go when it's raining or cold to avoid the

masses and head to the more obscure parts).

There are amphitheatres (including the one famously played by Pink Floyd for a 1972 concert film), laundries (where they used urine as a detergent), food-on-the-go places, houses, a forum and a brothel. Drawings and graffiti abound, including of the ancient good luck charm of a penis and scrotum.

It's a 30-minute bus ride from Naples, costing less than €3. Entrance to the site is €11. Also, check out Herculaneum €11, a more intimate site

even better preserved than its famous neighbour.

### Underground city

There is plenty of history in the centre too, of course, particularly under it. The Sotterranea has an ancient Greek and Roman aqueduct, later used as a shelter from Allied bombing towards the end of WW2, and a Roman theatre, slowly being excavated from underneath a residential street. A guided tour costs €10.

Those taken by the underworld should also visit the Santa Maria delle Anime del Purgatorio church. In the crypt, real anonymous human remains have been collected and are honoured as a shrine to the more recent dead – whose pictures nestle among the skulls – to ease their passage through

purgatory.

Artists often use the space for eerie exhibitions. A tour is €4.

### Museo di Capodimonte

Imagine a palace, at the crown of a hill over a crowded hot city. The garden grounds are a haven of peace, cooled by the sea winds. Inside is more fine art by more grand masters than seems possible in somewhere so strangely empty: Raphael, Botticelli, Breugel, El Greco, Titian and, good grief, Caravaggio.

Museo di Capodimonte boasts a vast collection, started by the Bourbon King Charles VII (later Charles III of Spain) in the 18th century – he also funded the excavation of Pompeii.

It has pieces ranging from the 13th century to contemporary work, and you also get to wander the divine palatial rooms.

We visited on a sunny Sunday morning and took a guided tour, from €16. There is also a delightful cricket pitch there. Entry is €12, the Caravaggio is an extra €15.

### Where to stay

From there, we went to check out of our hotel, which was a wrench to leave. The city is well served with accommodation – we went for the Romeo on the seafront, near where the enormous cruise ships dock.

Sit on the terrace bar before dinner with an Aperol Spritz and you can watch one of the 5,000-berth monsters setting sail.

For dining, there's the Beluga Bistro, with a range of local and national joys for the palate, or a Michelin-starred gourmet restaurant, Il Comandante – try the squid €35, and the Falanghina white, €27 per bottle.

There is also a superb spa where I don't think I embarrassed myself by falling asleep during the candle massage, €130 for 50 minutes, but then how would I know?

### In short

Go now. This buzzing, brilliant, bawdy city will fill you with renewed vim for life. Forza Napoli!

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### Get there



■ Original Travel offers a three-night B&B package at the Romeo Hotel, Naples, costs from €1,360 per person and including flights from various UK airports and private transfers. [originaltravel.co.uk](http://originaltravel.co.uk)

■ Tourist info: [visitnaples.eu](http://visitnaples.eu)

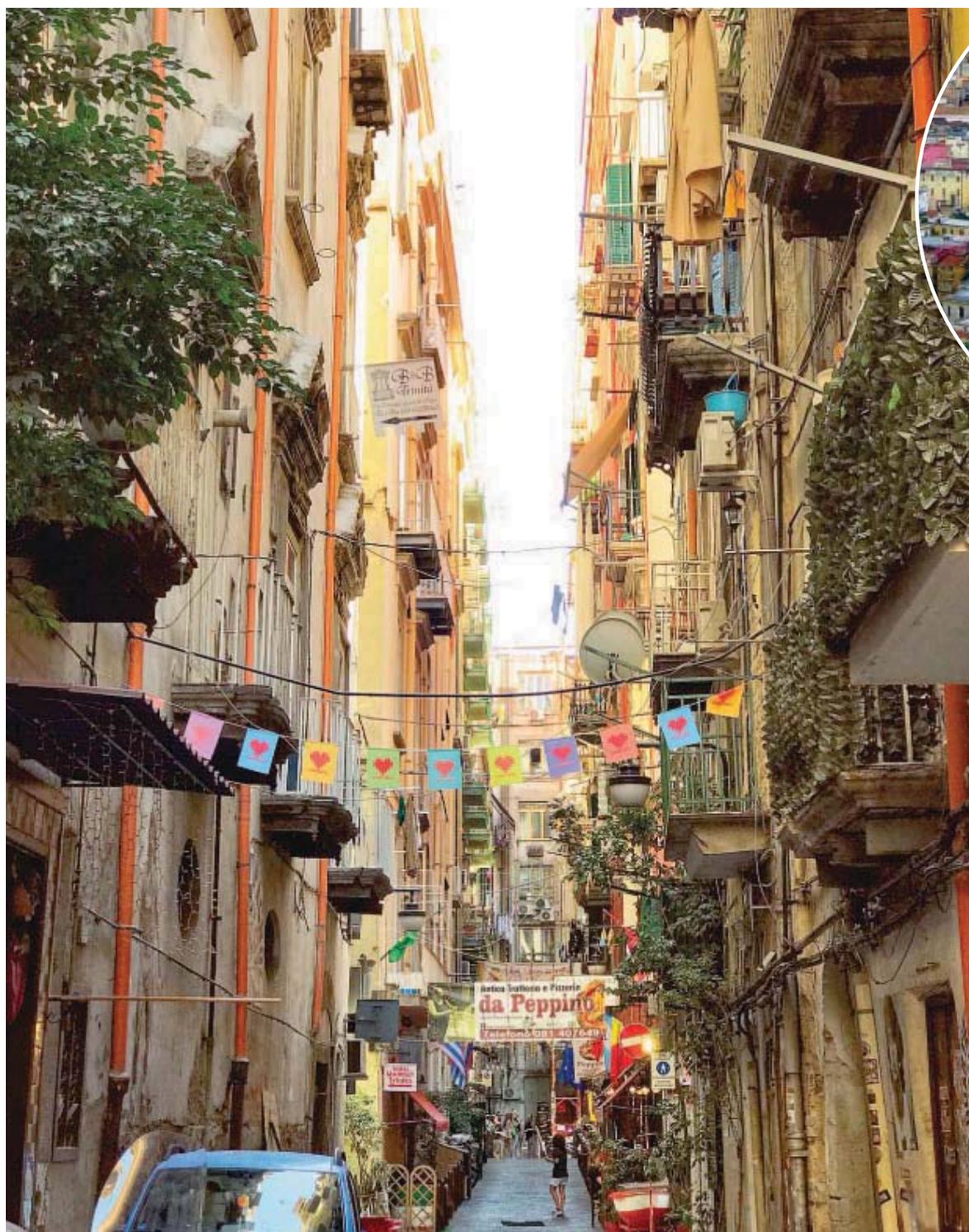


**STUNNING** Dan admires the view from National Museum of Capodimonte

*The mood of the locals may be Vesuvian ...but the lava soon cools*



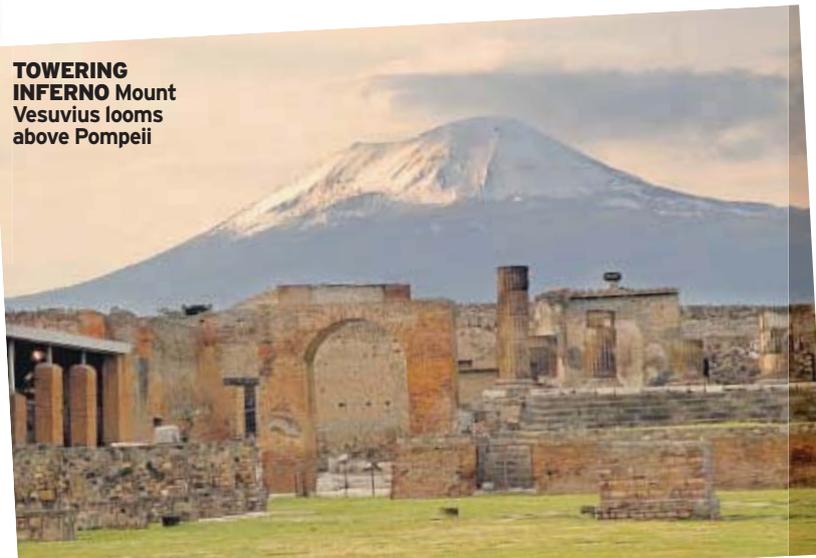
**MASTERPIECE** Caravaggio



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*It claims to be the home of pizza and specialises in a deep-fried version*

**TOWERING  
INFERNO**  
Mount Vesuvius looms above Pompeii



**ADOPTED SON**  
Maradona. Right, famed pizza

