

Salerno, The Hidden Jewel of the Amalfi Coast

by Isabelle and Michael

If you are interested in visiting the Amalfi Coast, stay in Salerno. You will avoid the hordes of tourists and high prices you are apt to find at more popular Amalfi Coast destinations. Your experience will be that of a traveller rather than just a tourist.

My husband and I stayed at Salerno Centro and we were so happy with the warmth and hospitality demonstrated by Francesco Manzo, his parents Lina and Pasquale and their very helpful assistant Kaoru. The Bed & Breakfast is located in a 16th Century historic building that was once a convent. The Bed & Breakfast is immaculate and provides a number of creature comforts such as air conditioning. The Manzo family go out of their way to ensure that guests have what they need.

When you step outside the medieval building where the B & B is located, you enter Piazza Portanova. This wonderful plaza is the very heart of the city of Salerno in the historic center. It is alive with Italian culture in the truest sense.

The more celebrated towns along the Amalfi Coast are beautiful in their own way. But a visit to the city of Salerno offers an authentic Italian experience. We were welcomed each morning by the shopkeepers on Piazza Portanova and immediately began to feel like locals ourselves.

Time slows down as you enjoy the Italian way of life in Salerno. There are inexpensive yet excellent restaurants, takeout delis and grocery stores (salumerias) with a rich offering of local foods like the buffalo mozzarella. There are cafes and gelaterias as well as

artisanal shops selling beautiful leather goods and ceramics. All of this is at your fingertips outside the front door of Salerno Centro.

Walking at the western end of Piazza Portanova, if you make a right turn you are on the elegant shopping street of Corso Vittorio Emanuele. This pedestrian-only wide boulevard offers something for everyone. There are shops selling couture next door to more affordable shops.

Corso Vittorio Emanuele must be one of the largest shopping districts in all of Campania and perhaps all of Italy. Its multitude of department stores (lovely COIN, for example), shops and places to eat and drink, interspersed with street vendors and, late at night, singers and musicians of all kinds, seems to stretch on forever.

And if this weren't enough, if you had made a left turn rather than a right off of Piazza Portanova, you would have entered Via dei Mercanti, a street much narrower than Corso Vittorio Emanuele but almost as long with a continuous stream of smaller shops, restaurants and street vendors both on the main thoroughfare and on the many side streets.

If you proceed toward the eastern side of Piazza Portanova, you are greeted by the breathtaking tree-lined Lungomare Trieste (known just as the Lungomare). This ever-enticing promenade stretches for several miles alongside the Bay of Naples with people, dogs and bicycles flowing in both directions. There is a bus stop on the Lungomare just steps from Salerno Centro where you can catch a bus to Pompeii or to the lovely commune of Vietri sul Mare. Vietri is known for the manufacture of beautiful ceramics. It is equally lovely as the better known coastal cities to its north but much less crowded.

Like Vietri, the city of Salerno itself, the southernmost point along the Amalfi Coast, is very often unjustly bypassed in favor of the more popular northern destinations such as Positano, Sorrento and Capri. But besides being a much less expensive place to stay, eat and shop, we found Salerno to be no less beautiful than these tourist-oriented cities and in some ways even more enticing. Because it attracts far fewer tourists, Salerno offers visitors an excellent opportunity to get to know some of the warm, friendly residents of this midsize Campania city and how they go about their daily lives.

When it was time to return home, we felt like we were leaving our Italian family. This was an incredible journey for us thanks to Francesco, Lina, Pasquale, and Kaoru at Salerno Centro.