



The crater of Vesuvius

famous travellers

At a distance the mountain seems to be harmless, the blue outline of the lofty cone terminating in a dense bank of smoke, like storm clouds gathering around the snowy peaks of the distant Apennines; but when the adventurous tourist wishes to approach nearer to its blazing crater, and toils up its torn and blackened sides, he will see in the immense chasms and rents traces of might convulsions.

A.J. O' Reilly, 1884

Whoever says Vesuvius, says Campania. Neapolitans call the most famous mountain in the world 'A Muntagna. It is the symbol of the City that, with its perfect form, closes the Gulf. The majestic cone dominates a disquieting and evocative environment. Tormented landscapes of savage beauty await the visitor: the panorama from the top of the mountain extends from the Sorrentine Peninsula to Capo Posillipo, giving rise to unforgettable memories, especially in the tenuous light of sunrise or with the intense ones of sunset.

Vesuvius is the only active volcano in continental Europe, and is also one of its most dangerous, as the land at its feet is densely populated and the houses arrive up to 700 mt above sea level. The summit to the left is that of Mount Somma (1133 mt), and to the right the cone of Vesuvius (1281 mt). They are separated by a valley called 'Valle del Gigante' (Valley of the Giant), in turn subdivided into 'Atrio del Cavallo' (Hall of the Horse, West) and 'Valle del Inferno' (Valley of Hell, East). The original inhabitants had forgotten that they were dealing with a volcano: it was known solely for its excellent wines and for the thick vegetation that covered its summit. It became suddenly famous when, in 79 BC, it erupted. Entire cities, among which Pompeii and Herculaneum, were destroyed. The last eruption, filmed by Allied troops, was in 1944. Since then the volcano has been dormant.

In 1991 the institution of **Vesuvius National Park** was decreed, and the "World Biosphere Reserve" status was given to it by Unesco. This comprises all of the area around the volcano, the entire archaeological system of Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis and the Miglio d'Oro (Golden Mile) with its splendid examples of 1700's and 1800's villas. As for the flora, the territories of the Vesuvius and the Somma differ in certain aspects. The former is more arid and sunny, with typical mediterranean vegetation, pine woods and holm-oak stands. The latter is moister, with woods of chestnut, oak, adler, maple and holm-oak trees. Among these you can come across, rarely, a splendid stand of birches, unusual for this mediterranean environment. There are also many orchids, 23 species in all, and the bright yellow broom, that so enchanted the poet Giacomo Leopardi. The fauna of the Park is also particularly interesting.

the Vesuvian Observatory

The Vesuvian Observatory is the oldest scientific institution dedicated to the study of volcanos, and was

founded in 1841. The original seat, an elegant neoclassic-style building, is on Vesuvius, between Herculaneum and Torre del Greco at a height of 608 mt. The old Bourbon building hosts a permanent exhibition that takes the visitor for a fascinating journey into the world of volcanos.

the Wine Trails and typical products of Vesuvius

Central to the Trail is the Vesuvio Doc, which safeguards the famous old Lacryma Christi wine.



Azienda Autonoma di Cura Soggiorno e Turismo di Pompei
via Sacra 1
tel. 081 8507255
www.pompeiturismo.it

Ufficio Turistico di Ercolano
via IV Novembre
tel. 081 7881243

Ente Parco Nazionale del Vesuvio
piazza Municipio 8
San Sebastiano al Vesuvio (NA)
tel. 081 7710911
fax 081 7718215
www.parcnazionaledelesuvio.it

Ente per le Ville Vesuviane
Uff. Eventi - Villa Campolieto
Corso Resina - Ercolano (NA)
tel. 081 7322134
fax 081 7391360
www.villevesuviane.net

Cimitile
Complesso delle Basiliche
Paleocristiane - via Madonnelle
tel. 081 5127141

Ercolano
Scavi - Corso Resina
tel. 081 7390963/8575347
Villa Campolieto - C.so Resina
tel. 081 7322134
fax 081 7391360

Museo Vulcanologico dell'Osservatorio Vesuviano
via Osservatorio 14
tel. 081 7777149
www.ov.ingv.it

Oplontis
Scavi, via Sepolcri 11
Torre Annunziata (NA)
tel. 081 8623163/8621755

Parco Letterario del Vesuvio
tel. 338 5318935
plivesuvio@libero.it
referente: Maria Lionelli

Santuario di Pompei
tel. 081 8577111
fax 081 8503357
www.santuario.it

not to be missed

Pompeii
Herculaneum
Climb to the top of Vesuvio
Villa Campolieto

vesuvian area in 1 day

Pompeii
Vesuvius National Park

vesuvian area in 3 days

Pompeii and Herculaneum
Vesuvius National Park
Portici Royal Palace
Vesuvian Villas of the Golden Mile
Sanctuary of Pompeii

shopping

Coral and cameos
Lava rock, copper and wrought iron and wicker objects

outings with children

Pompeii
Vesuvius National Park
Vesuvian Observatory
Park of the Royal Palace of Portici
Villa Bruno at San Giorgio a Cremano

The Park has many **trails**, differing in the scenery and levels of difficulty.

The Park Authority of Vesuvius has realised 9 trails for those who love to hike, well signalled with four different trail types: agricultural (Trail 7) panoramic (6), educational (9) and loop (from 1 to 5 and 8).

The historic climb is that which takes you to the crater: the trail, of medium difficulty, leaves from Herculaneum, takes three hours and is four km long, taking you to 1170 mt, where the view extends over the entire gulf on one side, and into the abyss of the crater on the other. It is 600 mt wide and 200 deep.

The trail has been travelled by many: from Ceckov, who lived it like a torment ("What martyrship it is to climb Vesuvius! Walk, walk, walk, and the summit is still so distant!") to Chateaubriand, the most audacious ("Here I am on the top of Vesuvius. I am writing sitting on the mouth of the crater and am ready to descend into the depths of its crater!")

Today it is possible to go up by car or bus. The best roads leave from Herculaneum, Ottaviano and Somma Vesuviana. The road that goes up from Herculaneum is the most interesting for its beautiful views of the gulf and for the evocative natural environment. The first part takes you through vineyards. From 1017 meters one proceeds on foot over a path made of lava cinder that takes you to the edge of the crater.



Villa Campolieto

events**January**

_Roasted Suckling Pig Festival
Sant'Antonio Abate

March-October

_Pompeii by Night
Among the moonlit ruins of the ancient city

April-May

_Mountain Festival
Somma Vesuviana

May

_Donkey Race
Ottaviano

June-July

_Opera in the Villas and Excavations of Herculaneum
Seaside Park of Villa Favorita - Herculaneum Digs

June

_Apricot Festival
Sant'Anastasia
San Sebastiano al Vesuvio
Somma Vesuviana
_Classico Pompeiano
Festival of Music and Prose
Teatro Grande di Pompei

July

_Vesuvian Villas Festival
Theatre, concerts, reviews
Vesuvian Villas
_Boar Sausage Festival
Boscoreale
_Ethnos - International Festival of Ethnic Music
Naples and Vesuvian municipalities

August

_Pesce Azzurro (Sardines etc.) Festival
Torre Annunziata
_Oil-Lamp Festival
(Every 4 years)
Somma Vesuviana

September

_Wine Festival
Trecase
_Honey and Tomato Festival
Pollena Trocchia
_Nick La Rocca European Jazz Festival
San Giorgio a Cremano
_Divino Jazz Festival
Torre del Greco

October

_Catalan Grape Festival
Somma Vesuviana
_Catalan Grape and Wine Festival
Pollena Trocchia

art and archaeology

Pompeii and Herculaneum
Oplontis
Portici Royal Palace
Vesuvian Villas of the Golden Mile

nature and parks

Vesuvius National Park

for young people

'Granatello' port in Portici
San Giorgio a Cremano

specialities

Vesuvian apricots
Cherry tomatoes on the vine
Stockfish from Somma Vesuviana
Vesuvian wines

spas and fitness

Thermal spas
of Torre Annunziata

Herculaneum and its treasures

famous travellers

I have just come from speaking... of Vesuvius and of the recently discovered ancient city of Herculaneum. Nothing is more remarkable than having found an entire city in the bosom of the earth.

Charles de Brosses, 1739

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After a long sleep, Vesuvius woke up on the 24th of August of 79 AD, taking the local population by surprise. The eruption was apocalyptic: life at the foot of the volcano was cancelled. Of the cities that were buried even the memory was lost. After 1,700 years, these lost cities of the Vesuvius started to reappear, offering to all of humanity the two most important archaeological sites in the world: Herculaneum and Pompeii. Unlike Pompeii, covered by a layer of ashes and lapillus, Herculaneum was submerged by a 25 meters thick layer of mud and lava. It was the mud that preserved it all, sealing everything: cloth and food underwent a slow transformation, remaining, however, un-altered in their wrapping, almost petrified. In 1709 Prince d'Elboeuf, digging a well in one of his villas, came upon the Theatre by chance. In 1738 Charles of Bourbon ordered the start of the excavations. The most clamorous surprise was the majestic **Villa of Papyri**, from which the bronze and marble sculptural patrimony (today in the Archaeological Museum of Naples), and the papyrus library (more than 1,800 philosophical texts, now housed in the Naples National Library) were extracted. In 1927, the excavation of the homes and public offices begun: in the north they reached the Forum, centre of economic, social and political life, to the east the sports centres, and to the south the suburban thermal spas.

At *Herculaneum* the wealthy Romans enjoyed their vacations, as testified by the sumptuous villas on the sea. The streets, paved with vesuvian lava rock or limestone, outline the characteristic "insulae" (island) urban planning. One of the most beautiful dwellings of the city is the **House with the Mosaic Atrium**, which owes its name to the beautiful black and white pavement. In the garden of the luxurious **House of the Deer** statues of deer attacked by dogs, of the Satyr with goatskin, and a drunken Hercules were found. The **Thermal spas of the Forum** were the public bathing houses of the city. In the **House of the carbonised furniture**, the wooden furniture is still in its original place: a bed and a small table. The **House of the mosaic of Neptune and Amphitrite**, with its shop (the most well preserved), has a grandiose atrium and the most beautiful mosaics of the city. The **House of Argus**, on two floors, has a garden encircled by porticos and columns. In the public realm, the **Forum** was excavated, crossed by the main street (*decumanus maximus*) and the **Shrine of the Augustals**, decorated with frescoes. Along the 'decumanus' there are porticos that bring to mind a public gathering place, probably the **Basilica**. Noteworthy the **Palestra**, a grand augustian building with an open-air swimming pool with, in its centre, a bronze fountain in the shape of a hydria. Outside the city walls the **Suburban Thermal Spas** can be admired. The Villa of Papyri, only partially excavated, is open to the public, but the **Theatre** is not. It takes about half a day to visit the Herculaneum excavations.



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Herculaneum

House of Neptune and Amphitrite



typical products

Vesuvian agricultural products, thanks to its rich mineral soil, excellent drainage and mediterranean

climate, are unique in their variety of produce and original flavour. Typical products are the apricots and cherries, as well as the famous cherry tomatoes "del piennolo" (on the vine). On the slopes of the volcano the Falanghina grapes of Vesuvius, Coda di Volpe (locally known as Caprettone) and the

Piedrosso del Vesuvio are cultivated. These grapes are harvested to make the famous Lacryma Christi (Tears of Christ), a wine with a pleasant bouquet and an aromatic and dry flavour. The great Catalanesca table grape is cultivated on the slopes of Mount Somma, where a great deal of honey is produced.



the "Vesuvius Literary Park", from Plinius to Leopardi

Vesuvius is one of the great scenic and cultural environments of Italy, and has always been the source

of great inspiration. Many writers and poets from all over the world have loved and written about it over the ages. Their renditions offer the visitor different insights into the vineyards, the broom shrubs, the lava and the heart of the volcano. These itineraries, inspired

by the writings, are the axis around which the Literary Park turns, with walks guided by and according to author or theme.

Pompeii, the buried city

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Pompeii, with four fifths of its urban area already excavated, is the most famous and evocative archaeological site in the world.

The eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD buried the city in a 6-7 meter thick layer of ash and cinder. Most of its inhabitants, escaping from their homes, found their deaths on the shore. The remaining few, in a vain attempt to save themselves in their basements, died asphyxiated: the moulds of their agonized bodies, obtained by pouring plaster into the cavities left by the bodies in the layers of ash, give moving testimony to the tragedy. A walk amongst the excavations of Pompeii is a unique experience. It is a journey into the past: one captures the feeling of life in ancient times, public, and, above all, private. The most surprising aspect is, in fact, the high number of homes, luxurious or humble, that have preserved their bottles, glassware and ovens. Even more surprising the amount of furnishings that have remained intact, permitting us to see into the most personal aspects of the life of the inhabitants.

In the summer months the Pompeii Archaeological Superintendence, with the collaboration of the Campania Region and the Council for Cultural Affairs, organise **evening tours** of the excavations. Along the route the most evocative aspects of Pompeii by night are revealed, accompanied by the music of Ennio Morricone. A multi-media presentation re-inacts the dramatic phases of the eruption.

The **Forum** was the active centre of the city: a large rectangular piazza (38x142 mt), it was paved with travertine and closed in on three sides by porticos. The **Capitolium** (a temple dedicated to Jupiter), the **Temple of Apollo** (built in the 3rd century BC and made up of a 48 Ionic columned portico) and the **Basilica**, the most important public building, seat of the courts of justice and centre of economic life, all give onto the square. The **Vespasian Temple** also gave onto the square, and was dedicated to the Imperial cult, as did the **graineries** and the **Macellum**, the covered fresh produce, meat and fish market, with indoor "tabernae" (shops).

Nearby is the **Forum Thermal baths**, divided into sections for men and women, with shared central heating.

The **via Abbondanza** (th road of Abundance) was the main artery of the city (tha name is modern, as are all Pompeiian names) along which all sorts of businesses plied their trade: craftsmen, stores, inns and laundries. The **Stabiane Baths**, the oldest of Pompeii, is along this road. Not far is the famous **brothel**, a two-story building whose true purpose was revealed by the many erotic paintings and licentious graffiti decorating it.

Detail of the Stabiane Baths



Forum of Pompeii

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The appeal in short was genial, and, faring out to Pompeii of a Sunday afternoon, I enjoyed there, for the only time I can recall, the sweet chance of a late hour or two, the hour of the lengthening shadows, absolutely alone. The impression remains ineffaceable.

Henry James, 1900

Of all the houses, the **House of the Faun** is considered the most beautiful: for its architectural elegance and for the famous mosaics, like the one representing the battle of Alexander and Darius, a masterpiece now in the Archaeological Museum of Naples.

The **house** belonging to the merchant brothers **Vettii** is admired for the many splendid frescoes that adorn the walls. The **Menandro house**, that takes its name from a painting showing the Greek comedy playwright Menandro, is the source of a rich collection of exceptionally high quality silverware (now in the Archaeological Museum of Naples). The **Villa dei Misteri** (of the Mysteries) is one of the most important buildings of Pompeii for its paintings. The most famous is the huge fresco that gave the Villa its name: 29 life-sized figures, painted with vivid colours on a red background, seem to depict some sort of Dionysian initiation ceremony or Orphic rite.

In the Theatre District two theatres have been recovered from the ashes: The **Teatro Grande**, where shows are organised in summer, and the little Odeion. Nearby is the lovely **Temple of Isis**. An epigraph demonstrates that the **Amphitheatre** is the oldest of the ones we know. Here gladiators wrestled with one another and with animals. Next to the amphitheatre is the **Palestra Grande** (Big Gymnasium), constructed under the reign of Augustus and used for gymnastic exercises. It is a large porticoed area with in its centre a swimming pool with diving board. A sunset visit to the **via dei Sepolcri** (the road of the Tombs) is particularly evocative, as the road passes by funeral monuments on its way to Herculaneum. A tour of the Pompeii excavations takes at least one day.



the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis

In Oplontis, an ancient suburb of Pompeii, also destroyed by the eruption of 79 AD (now belonging to

the town of Torre Annunziata), a villa that might have belonged to Poppea Sabina, Nero's second wife, has been found. It is one of the most grandiose and best preserved examples of *vacation villas* (1st century BC). Although it had been already partially abandoned at the time due

to restoration works following an earthquake in 62 AD (17 years prior to the eruption), the Villa, for its decorations and the beauty of its panorama, has no need to envy Imperial residences.



the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin of Pompeii

The Sanctuary of the Madonna del Rosario (our Lady of the Rosary), built at the behest of the blessed Bartolo Longo, is

one of the major centres of Marian devotion in Italy and the whole world. Built between 1876 and 1891, it was enlarged in 1933-39. The interior of the Pontifical Basilica is richly decorated with marble, frescos and mosaics. On the main altar a XVII century canvas of the *Madonna di Pompei*, by the

School of Luca Giordano, is venerated. It is surrounded by paintings on copper by Vincenzo Paliotti. On May 8th and the first Sunday in October, the Supplica, a prayer to Our Lady written by Longo himself, is recited in the Sanctuary. Every year the Sanctuary, described by Pope John Paul II the 'International

centre of spirituality for the Rosary', is visited every year by around 4 million pilgrims from all over the world. The corridors next to the Basilica are plastered with votive offerings, and the Museum exhibits precious objects received from sovereigns and the faithful from every country.

Fresco in the Villa dei Misteri

The Royal Palace of Portici and the villas of the Golden Mile

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The Miglio d'Oro (Golden Mile) is a part of the road that goes from Portici to Torre Annunziata, flanked by stupendous Villas. The Neapolitan aristocracy began to build here in the 1700's to imitate King Charles of Bourbon, who had a beautiful palace at Portici made for himself. To those who dared make mention of its dangerous vicinity to Vesuvius, Queen Maria Amalia would answer "God, the Immaculate Virgin Mary and Saint Gennaro will worry about that"! And so was born one of the architectural and historical patrimonies of the area, the Golden Mile of the Vesuvian Villas.

The **Royal Palace of Portici**, intended as the summer home of King Charles of Bourbon, briefly served a double purpose: royal Residence and home of the Herculanean Museum (objects uncovered at the excavations were kept here). Today the palace is seat of the Agriculture Faculty of the University. In the main body of the palace some of the frescoed rooms on the "noble floor" are interesting. The Park is very beautiful, a favourite meeting place for the residents of Portici. Ferdinand IV had the "little fort" (small copy of the fort in Capua) built here to render military exercises more realistic.

Villa Ruggiero



coral, cameos and lava rock

still create splendid ornaments working with this precious material. Another ancient tradition is the working of Vesuvian lava rock: a hard, black compact rock that takes on a silvery look.

For almost 200 years Torre del Greco has been synonymous with coral. The famous master craftsmen

The **Vesuvian Villas** (there are 121) were built with a taste for the splendid views of the Gulf. It is here that the Bourbon aristocracy spent its holidays until, after the unification of Italy, a steady decline set in. Many have only recently been restored.

At Herculaneum a visit to **Villa Campolieto** is well worth it. It is the most famous of the works of Luigi and Carlo Vanvitelli, renown for its beautiful exhedra that opens onto the Gulf and where, in the summer, the Vesuvian Villas Festival (theatre festival) is held. The plays are also performed at other villas along the Golden Mile, like **La Favorita** (The Favourite), realised in 1768 by Ferdinando Fuga, with its lovely park by the seaside.

famous travellers

As I was leaving the old picture gallery at Portici I encountered three English Officers that were on their way in. I went off at a gallop towards Naples, but, before getting to the Maddalena Bridge, I was joined by the three Englishmen who told me that those paintings are among the most extraordinary things in the universe.

Stendhal, 1817



Villa Favorita

Villa Campolieto

The Royal Palace of Portici



famous travellers

Villa Favorita was once used for many games and amusements in Autumn. With its garden, its flowers, its orange groves and resting house, it was an enchanted place.

Errico Alvino, 1845

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Nola and the Cimitile Basilicas

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Among the cities on the very fertile plains that stretch out around Vesuvius, **Nola** is worth a visit. Do not miss the Historic Archaeological Museum in the halls of the former Canossian Convent. Preserved here are relics that date back to the Bronze Age (circa 4,000 years ago) found not far from the city, buried by the great eruption known as "Pomice di Avellino" (Avellino Pomice) in 1900 BC. In the atrium the *Cippus Abellanus*, a block of stone with, incised on two sides with oscan writing, a federal treatise between Nola and Avella. In the **Diocesan Museum**, next to the Cathedral, 1600's wooden reliquary busts and codices in miniature are exhibited. In the historic centre, on piazza Giordano Bruno, sits the **Orsini Palace**, constructed between 1460 and 1500, today seat of the Courts of Justice. A stroll on the hills around the town can be interesting as the Episcopal Seminary, the Capuchin Convent, the picturesque Cicala Castle ruins, with its hamlet, and the Camaldoli Hermitage can all be found there.

A few kilometers from Nola is the town of **Cimitile**, famous for its magnificent complex of **paleo-christian basilicas**. The name derived from a cemetery in use since the 2nd century AD. Near this pagan necropolis the first Christians buried their dead and found refuge from persecution. San Felice was buried here, and around his tomb a sanctuary developed. In 394 the noble Paolino, who later became Bishop of Nola and Saint, had a Basilica constructed. Around these sacred places a complex flourished, made up of basilicas, churches, and shrines, in all at least 13 buildings, all decorated with frescoes and mosaics; one of the most fascinating examples of paleo-christian art in Italy.



the "runners" of Madonna dell'Arco

On Easter Monday, in front of the Madonna dell'Arco, ends the pilgrimage that every year sees a dense

crowd of barefoot faithful follow an ancient trail up to the Sanctuary of Maria Santissima dell'Arco (from the name of the ward of the Vesuvian town of Sant'Anastasia, known as Arco for the presence of a Roman aqueduct). The faithful are called "*fujenti*" ("runners" from the

neapolitan for "those that run"). They dress in white shirt and trousers with a light blue scarf around their necks (the colour of the Madonna) and a red one around their waists. They are also known as "beaters" for the rhythm their feet beat. Inside the sanctuary the walls are covered in a

enormous number of ex-votos received over the centuries.

Sanctuary of Maria Santissima dell'Arco



famous travellers

I had just entered Nola, when something strange caught my eye...I saw a kind of tower, tall and narrow, all decorated with red paper, gilded wood and silver friezes, carried on the shoulders of men...this colossus seemed at any moment ready to lose its equilibrium and topple over; all the figures were in motion, the flags flapping; it was a fantastic vision.

Ferdinand Gregorovius, 1853



The Basilicas of Cimitile

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the Gigli Festival of Nola

The Festival celebrates the return of Bishop Paolino from his imprisonment in Africa (410 AD) when he

was welcomed back with flowers and candles (*cilii*, from which the name *gigli*). In memory of this event for centuries the Nolans have carried ever larger candles and torches (up to the present day 25 mt high wooden towers) covered in paper-mache decorations. The heavy *gigli* are made to

"dance" by the "paranze di cullatori" (the teams of the "rockers") each carried by about 128 people. The festival takes place on the first Sunday after June 22nd, the feast of San Paolino.



The Nola Festival