



COSTIERA AMALFITANA

“He also promised her that the following Sunday he would take her to the Amalfi Coast, so they could relax for a while.”

My brilliant friend. The story of a new name, Elena Ferrante

The Costiera Amalfitana revealed in the words of Elena Ferrante is a refuge for Lenù and Lila, the protagonists of her novel, a place of longing where they can find peace of mind. Far from being only a physical space, the Amalfi Coast is a haven of the imagination, naturally inclined to be lulled by literary evocation thanks to the succession of towns and villages from Positano to Vietri sul Mare rivalling each other with breathtaking views, emerald beaches nestled in the cliffs, and blends of nature and architecture that defy any travellers’ expectations. Characterised by a patchwork of cliffs, woods, citrus groves and vineyards, the landscape of the Costiera has preserved its aura intact over the centuries – its famous coastal road is the best way to appreciate how successfully human talent could erect fine buildings in this rugged territory. Signs of the plots of history, from the splendours of the classical era to the epics of the Republic of Amalfi and the golden glories of Arab-Norman culture, are visible as an ever-shining legacy in the squares of the historical centres of the villages that stand out like gems in this wild mountainous land.



CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

UNESCO DOSSIER: 830
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: NAPLES, ITALY
DATE OF INSCRIPTION: 1997



CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The Costiera Amalfitana is a breathtaking Mediterranean landscape that has preserved its beauty and biodiversity over time. Covering more than 11,000 hectares and including 13 towns in the province of Salerno, it is an area of extraordinary cultural significance, known for its artistic and historical excellence, where unspoiled nature harmoniously coexists with human life.



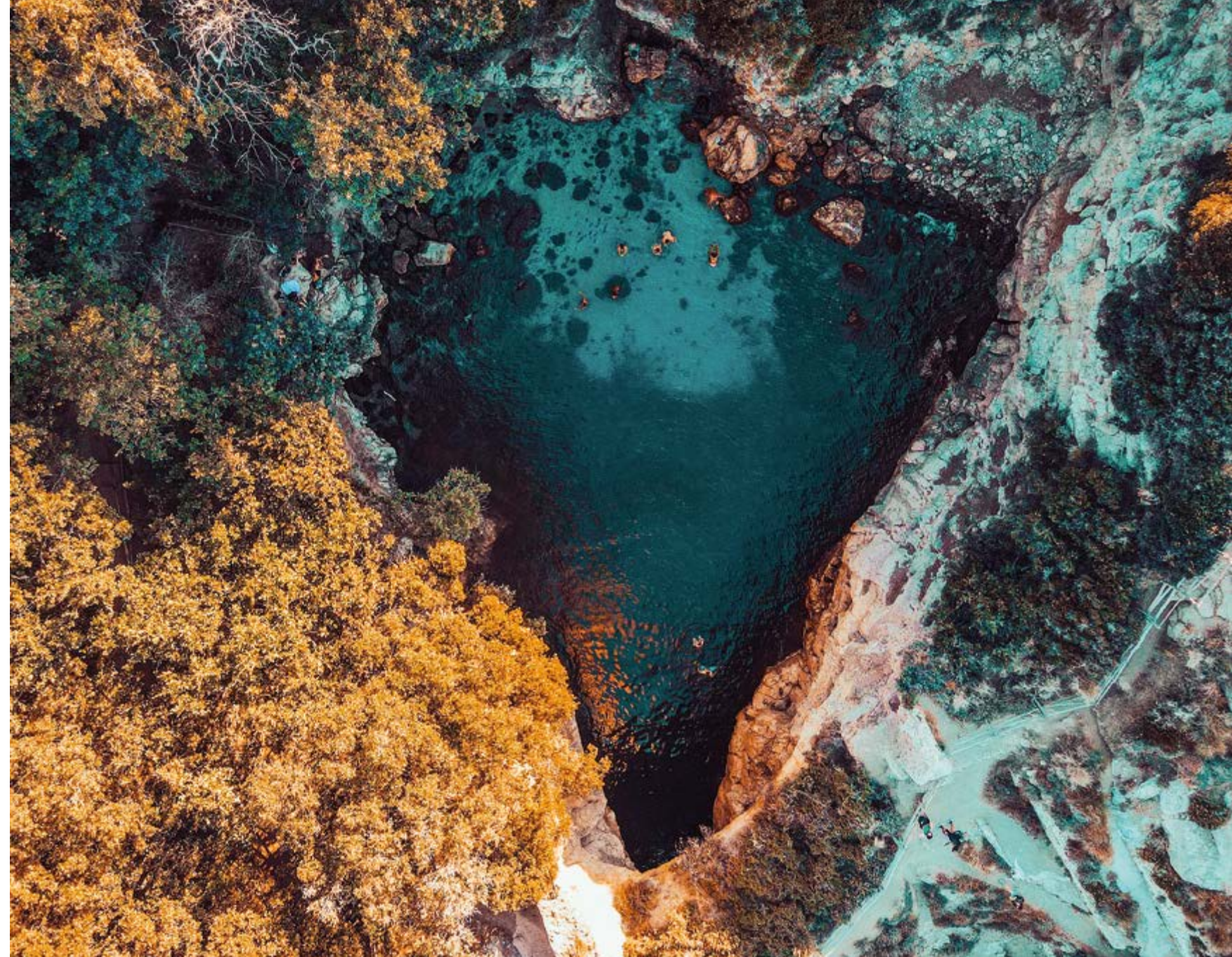
“She climbed the stone steps trying not to think of anything but the sea and the sun, concentrating on what she was seeing. As always her mood improved whenever she was in Positano.”

La casa degli specchi, the novel by Cristina Caboni, depicts the Amalfi Coast as a place of miraculous power – Milena, the protagonist, can only find tranquillity when she is in Positano and nowhere else. Just try and see if it works for you as well! Some say that Positano is at its best at dawn when the scent of lemons wafts with the morning breeze, caressing its endless flights of steps. Others claim that it is most captivating at night, when a wall of lights overlooks the harbour and the miracle of the town built vertically on a steep cliff face is perceivable in all its solemnity. Yet others find it irresistible on bright days that enhance the chromatic prowess of the pastel-coloured homes. There is only one way to discover who is right – delve into it, snoop around, and find your own reason to love it.

Set off from Positano in the peaceful atmosphere of the **1 Church of Santa Maria Assunta**. Its tiled dome, visible from the sea, is an iconic symbol of the town, rivalled only by Mimmo Paladino’s whimsical sculptures and mosaics decorating the piazza in front of it. Step inside the church to discover hints of Baroque style and, before all else, the notable 13th-century Byzantine icon portraying a curious Black Madonna and Child above the main altar. Moving on to the nearby **2 MAR – Roman Archaeological**

Museum, explore the rooms of an original Roman villa, buried by a shower of ash and lapilli during the 79 A.D. eruption of Mt Vesuvius. The museum also encompasses some of the underground spaces of the **Church of Santa Maria Maggiore** located above. Highlights include the 18th-century upper crypt with its cheerful seats where corpses were left to dry, the medieval crypt, and the colourful frescoes decorating the *triclinium*. Weather permitting, head to the **3 Spiaggia Grande**. Despite its

greyish sand and lined umbrellas, far from Caribbean ideals, the beach, with its pleasant little harbour, is the social hub of Positano. Its size is impressive compared to the tiny beaches along the Amalfi Coast, which is why they call it “Grande”, i.e., big. For a quieter, less glamorous experience, follow a coastal path westward for about ten minutes to **4 Fornillo Beach**. Once there, simply enjoy the sun and sea, just like the protagonist of *La casa degli specchi*. Does it lift your spirits?



VILLAS OF DELIGHT

“There’s a villa on high that gazes down [...] where the grapes ripen on the slopes of the hills [...] here the savage waters are tamed. The sea is wonderfully calm [...] and sea-green Galatea take their pleasure in bathing [...] This building faces east, towards Apollo’s first rays, that one causes him to linger, denies the fading light as the day tires, and the mountain’s darkening shadow meets the sea, and the palace swims in the glassy water.”

Silvae II 2, Publius Papinius Statius

Pollius Felix, the owner of the villa described by the Roman poet Statius, must have been a very fortunate man. Back then just like today, the Amalfi Coast attracted the Roman elite to leisurely hours in grand villas of delight. While only a few ruins remain of Pollius’s marvellous villa on the rocky spur of Cape Sorrento, now inhabited by fish and seagulls, a visit is still exciting, especially paired with a dip in the Baths of Queen Giovanna. This bay, immortalised by Statius, is a place of perfect beauty cherished by both Pollius’s family and by Queen Joanna of Anjou, who lent it her name. Positano’s MAR emphasizes the connection between the elite and the Coast: located 11 m below the Church of Santa Maria Assunta, it offers a glimpse into the remains of a luxurious villa buried by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius.



‘THE BEAUTY OF ATRANI LIES IN IT LOOKING LIKE AN OPEN-AIR LOUNGE SURROUNDED BY A SMALL BEACH WITH A TANGLE OF ALLEYWAYS AND DWELLINGS AROUND IT. A PERFECT SIGHT IN THE EVENING, WHEN THE COLOURED LIGHTS TURN IT INTO A MASTERPIECE. WANDERING THROUGH ITS ALLEYWAYS IS A FASCINATING FEAT - LIKE

CHINESE BOXES, THEY HIDE ENDLESS SURPRISES [...].’

The Amalfi Coast's poetic beauty shines through the bright intensity of its nature and villages. As Gennaro Cuomo reminds us in his novel *Ritorno ad Atrani*, when the sun sets, the piazzas become lounges and brighten with colours, boasting a photogenic charm, but when the sunlight paints the domes and majolica tiles, the spectacle is as vivid as the boldest palette. Venture into the nuances of the Costiera's landscape, as if on a colour tour, starting at **1 Vietri sul Mare**. Known throughout Campania for its traditional ceramic

work, it abounds in craft workshops, wall decorations, small shops with kaleidoscopic coverings and square kilometres of majolica tiles, while the intensely blue sea complements the village's lively array of shades, lapping against the lively beaches of its lower part. Head then on towards **2 Ravello**, where **Villa Rufolo**, its symbol, awaits you. Once you walk through the 14th-century tower south of the cathedral, you will be plunged into an architectural universe dating from the 12th to the 14th centuries, plus a 19th-century garden overlooking the sea that would soothe even the most restless souls. Marvel at the vegetation gently caressing the ruins, the exotic flowers and their bright purple and magenta nuances contrasting with the sky and sea. Next, visit **3 Atrani**, the smallest municipality in Italy measuring 0.12 sq km to enjoy the jumble of the flamboyant houses that make it up, but be sure to keep some time for a detour to the public **beach** east of the centre – the best choice for a family day at the seaside. To end your tour on such a high note that will give you vertigo, choose the village named **4 Furore**. It is a series of small houses lining hairpin bends with no centre at all, not even a small square; yet, as you step across the cultivated terraces, you will relish a bird's-eye view of the sea, seemingly flipping the sky upside down. Further down, gaze in awe at the so-called fjord, an inlet created by river erosion and abrasions due to changes in the sea level. While not technically a **fjord**, its sight is almost mystical. As you taste your pizza in the evening carefree atmosphere of the Coast, enlivened by words in dialect shouted in the alleyways, let yourself be carried away by the scent of sea salt and lemons. Here, you will overhear fishermen's tales alongside stories of heartthrobs and home cooking that will imprint themselves in your travel memories.



KIDS



THE COSTIERA AMALFITANA in books

Reading suggestions to dream of the Costiera Amalfitana.

• **Silvae II 2**, Publius Papinius Statius (93 A.D.). A collection of 32 Latin poems divided into five books. Allegedly written by Statius between 89 and 96 A.D., the poems are dedicated to various subjects and tell about Rome at the time of emperor Domitian.

• **The long road of sand**, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1959). Summer 1959. Pier Paolo Pasolini, on board of a Fiat Millecento, travelled along the entire Italian coastline from La Spezia to Trieste driving also across the Amalfi Coast.

• **My brilliant friend**, Elena Ferrante (2011). An exciting four-volume story that has made Elena Ferrante's writing popular and cherished all over the world. It is the story of Lenù and Lila, two friends who grew up in the suburbs of a lively post-war Naples, with frequent “raids” on the Costiera, especially to Amalfi.

• **Una noche en Amalfi**, Begoña Huertas (2012). A thriller unfolding in one long summer night. Sergio and Linda are a Spanish couple on holiday on the Amalfi Coast; when Linda disappears into thin air, Sergio embarks on her desperate search.

• **Il cielo è sempre più rosa**, Ledra Loi (2015). For the fans of contemporary romance novels, here is a tale set amidst the enchanting atmosphere of the Positano literary festival. Co-authored by Ledra and Luce Loi, it delves into the lives of three avid bookworms – Zoe, Gio, and Penelope – as they cross paths with three captivating men...

• **Meeting in Positano: A novel**, Goliarda Sapienza (2015). The autobiographical story of Goliarda Sapienza and Erica, so beautiful as to be called the “Princess” of Positano – two parallel lives that intertwine on the Amalfi Coast, where Goliarda is searching for film extras for her professional activity.

• **Ritorno ad Atrani**, Gennaro Cuomo (2016). Set in Atrani, the heart of a colourful universe, this novel offers

vivid descriptions of the Amalfi Coast's landscape.

• **La casa degli specchi**, Cristina Caboni (2019). This is the story of Milena, who was raised in a grand villa in Positano before moving to the North. Her life takes a dramatic turn when she discovers that her grandmother, who fled to America years earlier, had been a film star. Why had no one ever told her?

• **The Gentleman from Peru**, André Aciman (2020). A tale of love and mystery, this story follows a group of American tourists on the Amalfi Coast and their encounter with Raul, a man with a magical aura who possesses special powers.

Children's books:

• **Miti straordinari. Storie di eroine, eroi, divinità e creature che non ti aspetti**, Marilù Oliva (2023). The Amalfi Coast is steeped in myth and the scent of lemons, making it an essential, ethereal element of every story. With an unprecedented approach that resonates with the sensibilities of today's youth, this Greek mythology compendium is the perfect companion for a trip to the Costiera.