

ATRANI, ITALY AND THE AMALFI COAST

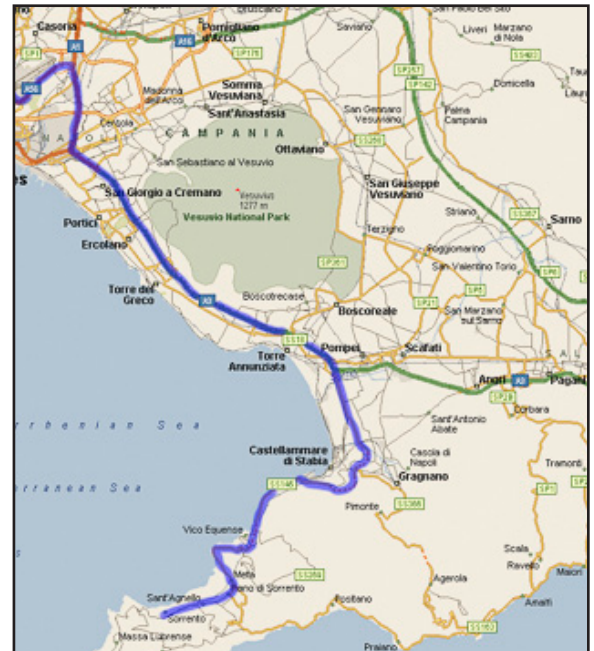
Barcelona to Naples

We left Barcelona in the early AM, tentatively locking the door of our rental flat behind us with the keys left inside as requested (and us hoping we didn't forget anything). One of my go-to coffee shops was open early and we stopped for a last coffee, croissant and orange juice breakfast, ala Barcelona. After our breakfast it was a short five minute walk to the Plaça de Catalunya, (a large plaza surrounded by monumental buildings, and Barcelona's busiest square), where we caught a bus to the airport and our flight to Naples.

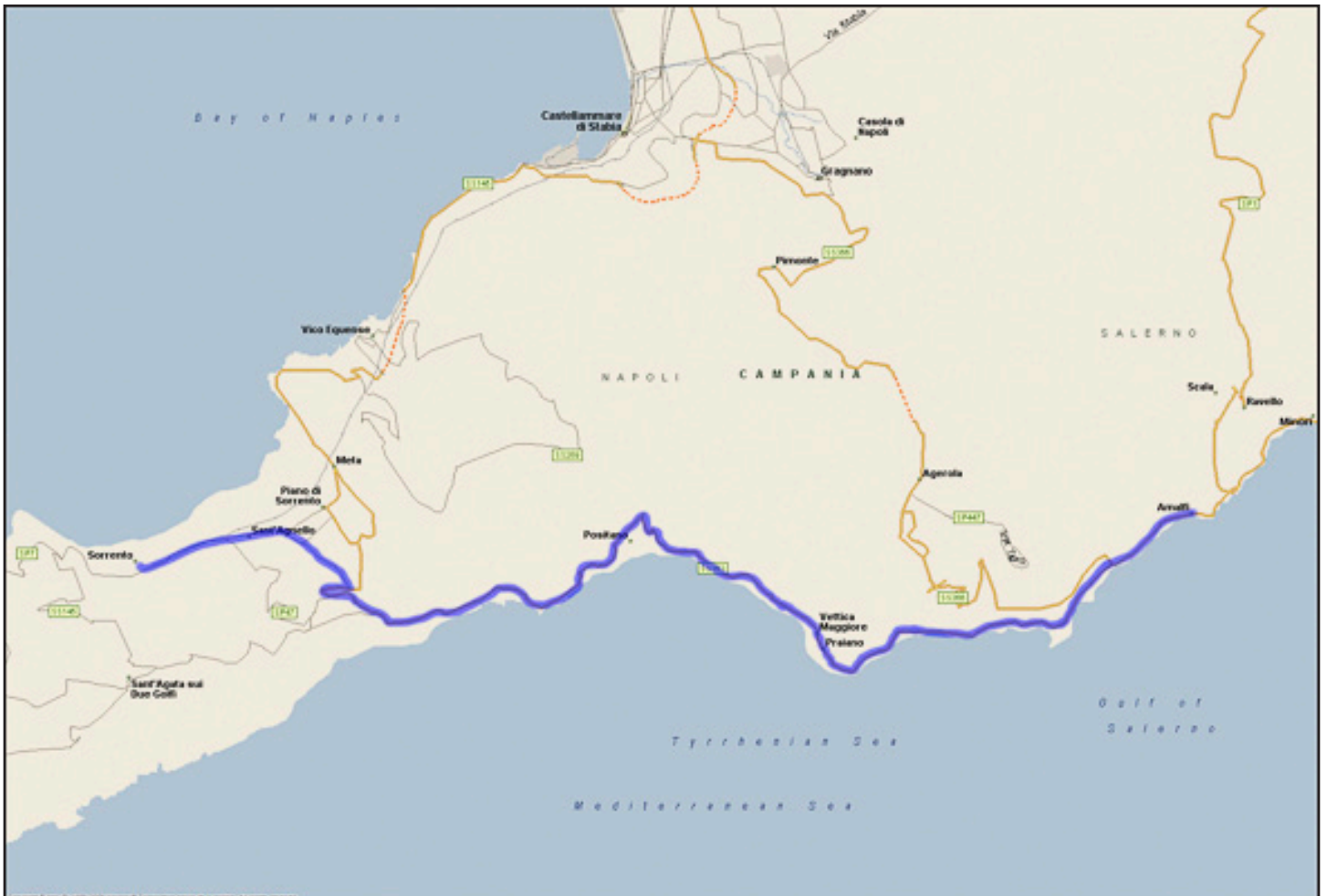


Naples to Amalfi....

Well before hand and primarily due to Naples reputation of being rough on travelers, I had decided to take a bus that ran directly from the airport to Sorrento in order to avoid being caught up in the traps that were certain to be sprung upon us should we venture into Naples proper.



Safely past Naples and on our way to Sorrento, we look back north to Naples....



In Sorrento we had to switch buses and travel the famously narrow, winding, cliff hugging, continuous one-lane, hair-pin paved goat trail (with very infrequent 1.5 lane curves and NO straight bits) along the Amalfi coast to Amalfi itself. This masterpiece of minimalist road is carved out of the sheer cliffs. Where it was decided not to follow that construction method, the tarmac was placed on some unknown and unseen supports that jutted out over the abyss and well out over the Mediterranean Sea. The views were astounding and straight down... my view was even better because the bus was so crowded I had to stand up the entire way, offering me a slightly higher vantage point from all those thoughtless and selfish people sitting down. Bouncing around from side to side, without choice, inertia introduced me to several new people. I tried to look really old, but not even one person offered me their seat and all refused to look into my purposely sad, tired and fearful eyes.

After we extricated ourselves from the bus in Amalfi, it was a short 10 minute walk along the same busy paved path we had been traveling on to the small village of Atrani. Only now we were sharing it with the traffic, hiding in alcoves and wide spots waiting for spots between passing cars. Atrani and Amalfi are separated only by one standard Amalfi coast hair pin corner and a short tunnel which pedestrians share with the motor vehicles, (as there are no walkways through it). It was possible for two motor vehicles to pass inside the tunnel, but there would be no room for even the smallest of pedestrians. As it were, drivers that found themselves having to pass each other inside the tunnel were still puckered up upon exit. We would later find a pedestrian only tunnel and a stairway which would allow us to avoid the famed Amalfi 'highway' (except for one spot where we had to cross it) and get to and from our Atrani rental flats to Amalfi.





We found our way easily to the three story building our rental flats were in. Again, Google Earth and the street views prepared us well in that way. As I leaned out over the railing across from our rooms there was a card game below. These fellas were there most everyday, and when it rained I found them inside a building just off the same square where I was to find my go-to Atrani situation room, cafe and bar.

All I had was a telephone number of Pio Caruso (the fellow we had arranged the rental from) and the address of the flats. My plans of just calling him from my own cell phone when we got there hit a snag, albeit not a very big one.

Without the telephone I had planned on having, there was no way to contact Pio directly.

We knocked on a couple doors and failed to rouse anyone. Before I could start my journey in search of someone to make the call to Pio for me, an English couple that had been renting the very same flat we were to be staying in, came into the building. Very fortunate, as they knew just what cafe / bar to find Pio in. I was already liking this little town! So, off we went to the bar. No Pio though, but they called him and in less time than it took me to have a small beer Pio's brother was there.

I was led back to the building where Wendy and Pat were already in. As it turned out Pio's mother (and Pio sometimes) live there too and had not heard us knocking. After I had left for the bar someone had come out and had already started getting Pat and Wendy settled in.

We packed our luggage up the stairs and were introduced to our rooms for the week. Very nice rooms with great views. We all felt it was a grand place to end our month of travel. Our rooms had very large balconies which overlooked the Mediterranean Sea, the small Atrani beach and the village itself. We had our breakfast served to us every morning on the balcony. The narrow road poised upon a viaduct structure in the photograph below is the main Amalfi highway and offered one of the longest of the few straight bits along the coast. The photograph below was taken from our balcony.

You rent the beach lounge chairs. I read that the same people come back every year and rent the very same chairs each year. The upright poles are umbrellas.



Wendy and Pat searching for me at my Atrani situation room, (Bar Birecto).



Typical view from my situation room, Italian guy flirting with female tourists, an artist drawing.... and a photographer...



To get to anything by foot on the Amalfi coast involves stairs up!

There are no stairs that go down!





We went to Amalfi several times. It was a very touristy place, with cruise ships stopping, ferry service going north and south, the terminus for several bus systems, as well as parking for land based tourist buses. It was crowded, but had some good restaurants and interesting sights.



"Muscle Beach" Amalfi style. Very interesting attachment for shade I think. The attachment on the lounge chair... ladies!



This is the uphill side of Atrani, looking back out toward the Mediterranean Sea. Very typical of how most of the towns are built back up into the ravines and valleys.



There are walking paths between the towns along the coast as well as to the towns and villages inland from the sea. All paths lead up steep stairs and paths of course. If you keep hiking up the path from Atrani you will eventually come to Ravello, (or you could go back down and take a bus like I did). It was a very picturesque town and had some outstanding views up and down the coast.

This view is from Ravello with the Amalfi coast town of Minori and its famous beaches in the distance.

One day we took the ferry back north out of Amalfi to Positano, yet another picturesque town spilling into the sea from the cliffs above and another wildly popular tourist destination. The views were nice from the ferry and the ride much more pleasant than the bus and serpentine paved goat path of a highway.



Positano was a more upscale than Amalfi and had several pretty nice art galleries.



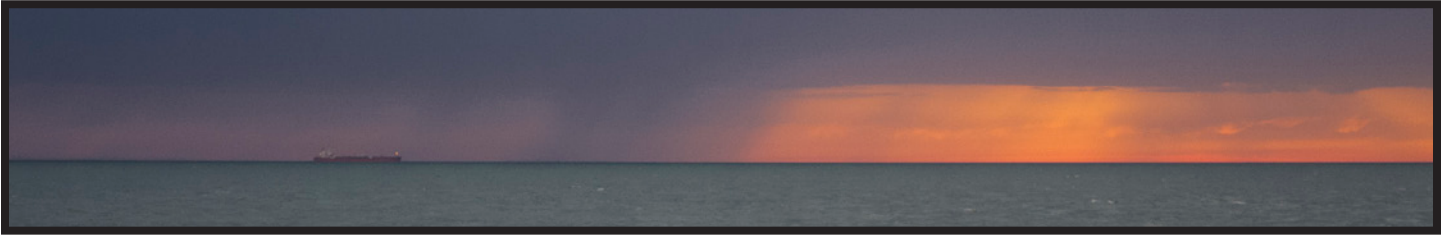
A little Picasso influence in a less than soft lounge chair.



We sadly and very reluctantly left Atrani via the passenger ferry south out of Amalfi to Salerno.

It was a very sad sight to see this great view of Atrani and our wonderful rooms slide by into the distance as the ferry pushed its way south to Salerno.





From Salerno we took a train to Rome, then Rome out to the coast town of Fiumicino where the main Rome airport is. After an easy switch to the airport train in Rome, we took a shuttle to our hotel at the mouth of the Tevere River. We checked into our nice rooms and then took a walk on the pier cross the street. There we had one last Italian / Mediterranean sunset, returned to the hotel for dinner and then turned in for a good rest before our early AM flights to Vancouver, BC the next day.

The next morning I walked out onto the pier outside the hotel and took my last photograph before heading to the airport.



In the airport I did find a Ferrari store. I don't have any space left in the garage otherwise I might have...

As we winged our way over France we had the pilot dip a wing as a salute to our friends Hugh and Brenda that are living in Paris for a year.



We got a free tour of the airspace on our way into London. I understand it is a pretty typical tour though.



I was beginning to think we were really maximizing our stops until I read that as we were landing the night before at about 7PM, the Interstate 5 bridge at Burlington, WA was collapsing into the Skagit River. We had reservations on a bus to Seattle the next morning. Timing is everything... Not only that, it was an AmCrash bus as they have finally figured out they can't run a train system so they are trying buses now.

On our way into the Burlington Purgatory.





And finally to Seattle, the ferry, the bus and then a short walk home.... I never get tired of this view of Seattle from the ferry!

And that is the end of our trip to Spain and Italy.

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