Clockwise from top left: Discovering the town; Fornillo Beach seen from the walkway along Via Postizzani d’America; arriving in Positano by ferry; Casa e Bottega salads; fishing nets and ropes recall the town’s heritage; wisteria blooming in the spring; a bougainvillea-covered walkway; Casa e Bottega desserts.
In a landscape of captivating vistas like the Amalfi Coast, there’s something special about Positano that speaks to the hearts of travellers. With its pastel-hued homes clinging to the mountains as they drop dramatically to the sea, it’s a seemingly impossible town, achingly beautiful, and distinctly its own. Even though I’ve lived just down the coastline in Amalfi for a decade, I am certainly not immune to Positano’s unique charms. Every time I take the ferry to Positano, I’m right there at the window – side by side with first-time visitors – ready to catch that first glimpse in the distance. Even before arriving, Positano has a way of getting under your skin.

When Steinbeck introduced Positano to the world in his 1953 essay for Harper’s Bazaar, he wrote: “Positano bites deep. It is a dream place that isn’t quite real when you are there and becomes beckoningly real after you have gone.” As the ferry approaches Positano, I think how Steinbeck nailed it. The town has an air of dreaminess about it that only adds to its appeal and popularity as a holiday destination. Once on shore, even I feel like I’m on vacation while strolling through town. Positano is the place to really soak up la dolce vita in one of Italy’s most enthralling settings.

It is one of the most famously picturesque towns in Italy, and a magnet for tourists. Laura Thayer says that once you’ve been, you can’t stop going back...
WHAT TO SEE AND DO

SANTA MARIA ASSUNTA
Via Marina Grande
☎ +39 089 875480
chiesapositano.it

While its origins date back to the 10th century, Positano’s main church as seen today is from the 18th century, including the Neoclassical interior with gold details. A treasured 12th-century icon of the Virgin Mary hangs above the altar. The church is located on the site of an ancient Roman villa, and the archaeological site is scheduled to open to visitors in 2018.

SPIAGGIA GRANDE BEACH
Via Marina Grande
Positano’s main beach stretches out along the base of the town just steps from Santa Maria Assunta and is lined with restaurants and shops. Much of the beach is managed by private establishments that rent out sunbeds and umbrellas along with offering changing rooms and shower facilities. However, a free area is open to the public in the middle of the beach.

FORNILLO BEACH
Via Fornillo
The second largest beach in Positano is mainly missed by day trippers, but is easily reached by foot along Via Positanesi d’America or by boat service by the private beach establishments like Da Ferdinando. Local legend says that the name refers to ancient Roman times when there were bread ovens (forno in Italian) here that were favoured by Emperor Tiberius.

PATHWAY OF THE GODS
Sentiero degli Dei
Considered one of the most beautiful hikes in the world, the Sentiero degli Dei literally translates as Pathway of the Gods. Leading from the hamlet of Bomerano in Agerola to the hamlet of Nocelle high above Positano, it meanders through the beautiful Monti Lattari and offers spectacular views over the Amalfi coastline all the way to Capri.

LI GALLI ISLANDS
Often described as the mythical home to the Sirens in the Ancient Greek world, this small archipelago is famous today for once being the home of Russian dancer Léonide Massine and later Rudolf Nureyev. While the islands are privately owned, get a closer look on a cruise from Positano and stop for a swim between the islands.

 lies on the Li Galli Islands.

Don’t Miss

FERRAGOSTO

While Ferragosto is celebrated across Italy on August 15th, it’s an extra big event in Positano. Italy’s annual summer holiday also marks the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin, which makes it the largest religious festival of the year in Positano. See the town’s re-enactment of the arrival of their treasured Byzantine icon, a procession and fireworks over the sea.

THE VERTICAL CITY

Positano spills down from Monte Sant’Angelo, which soars to just over 4,700 feet. Gazing up to the top I see the hamlets of Nocelle and Montepertuso nested in the mountains. At the bottom of the valley, surrounded by houses seemingly stacked one on top of the other, the church of Santa Maria Assunta stands out with its geometrically patterned dome.

Taking it all in from the beach, it’s easy to see why Positano is called the Vertical City.

Travellers have been appreciating the landscape of Positano since ancient times. Traces dating back to the Mesolithic Age have been found in grottoes near Positano. It was the Greeks and later the Romans who left the first settlements here. The ruins of two Roman villas have been uncovered, one on the largest of the Li Galli Islands off the coast of Positano and the other directly below Santa Maria Assunta. Soon, modern day travellers will be able to get a glimpse of what Roman living in Positano was like when the excavated villa with its brilliant frescoes below the church opens to the public.

Stepping into the cool nave of Santa Maria Assunta, the first impact is the brilliant white and gold Neoclassical design dating from the 18th century. I stop to admire the Byzantine icon above the altar – one of the town’s prize possessions. There are a host of local legends surrounding the painting, varying from Saracen pirates to miracles. One says that the painting was aboard a ship stranded off the coast of Positano when the sailors heard a voice calling out, “Possa, Possa!” (“Put me down, put me down.”) This is said to be the origins of Positano’s name.

Every summer on Ferragosto, the August 15th holiday dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin, the Positanei recreate the arrival of their
celebrated icon with an elaborate procession through town and along the beach. When the legend comes to life on a hot summer night, I can sympathize with the icon wanting to stay here forever.

A DAY AT THE BEACH
One of Positano's most scenic commodities is its beaches. The heart of the town spreads out around Spiaggia Grande with its neatly lined up rows of umbrellas and sunbeds. During the summer, this beach is the hub of activity all day long, from the ferries coming and going at the town's cement pier to the trendy Music on the Rocks nightclub carved into a cave. From the pier, I spot small motor boats heading to and fro, their engines humming with the song of the sirens still seem to linger in the air.

At the beach, I settle into a sunbed. Since beaches on the Amalfi Coast are rocky, renting a sunbed is always the most comfortable option. Gazing out to sea I spot the Li Galli Islands. Local lore says they were the home of the mythical sirens from Homer's Odyssey. Listening to the waves tumbling pebbles to and fro, the song of the sirens still seems to linger in the air.

HAVEN FOR ARTISTS
Back in the centre of town, I spot a few artists at work painting local scenes, their easels set up right at the edge of the beach. It's easy to be inspired in Positano. With its colourful collage of buildings dotted with bright bursts of bougainvillea all awash with sunshine, the town itself seems like a painting that has come to life. Very fitting for a town that has been a haven for artists since the late 1800s.

WHERE TO STAY

LE SIRENUSE
Via Cristoforo Colombo, 30
+39 089 875066
sirenuse.it

Regularly voted as one of the top luxury hotels in Italy, Le Sirenuse is a Positano icon. Opened in 1951 by the Sersale family, the hotel has perfected modern luxury while maintaining a family atmosphere. From the Michelín-starred La Sponda restaurant to cocktails at trendy Franco's Bar, a stay at Le Sirenuse is as dreamy as the view if offers overlooking Positano.

PALAZZO MURAT
Via dei Mulini, 23
+39 089 875177
www.palazzomurat.it

Located near Santa Maria Assunta, this hotel offers a stay surrounded by history. Stepping into the beautifully curated garden courtyard of this 18th-century palace is like going back in time. This was once the favourite summer residence of Gioacchino Murat – Napoleon's brother-in-law and the King of Naples. Enjoy a stay fit for royalty right in the heart of Positano!

COVO DEI SARACENI
Via Regina Giovanna, 5
+39 089 875400
www.covodeisaraceni.it

For travellers looking to be right in the centre of action, this boutique hotel has an enviable location overlooking Positano’s main beach and near the pier where ferries arrive and depart. Some rooms even feature private pools and jacuzzis. The hotel’s pool terrace offers one of the best spots for relaxing with a panoramic view of Positano.

CASA BUONOCORE
Via Cristoforo Colombo, 77
+39 089 875085
www.casabuonocore.com

Situated in the heart of Positano near Le Sirenuse, this 6-room guest house offers panoramic views at a price much easier on the budget than its 5-star neighbour. Each room looks straight out of design magazine and offers a cozy and friendly setting where travellers can truly feel like a part of the Buonocore family.

VILLA MARY
Via Liparlati, 53
+39 089 875216
www.villamary.it

One of Positano’s most popular BB&Bs and with good reason. Located near the top of Positano, the sea view rooms offer views of the tumble of pastel buildings spilling down to the sea. Stylish rooms, attentive service, and a breakfast to remember are just a few of the features that recommend this charming BB&B.

DON'T MISS

THE WISTERIA
Just when you think Positano couldn’t get any lovelier, the wisteria blooms in the spring, adding an extra dose of sweetness to the air. Draped over balconies and pergolas, it can be enjoyed simply strolling around town. The wisteria blooms between March and April, depending on the weather.
WHERE TO EAT

DA VINCENZO
Viale Positano, 172/178
☎ +39 089 875128
www.davincenzo.it
Here's where to find the most traditional Amalfi Coast pasta dishes served in a welcoming family setting. Don't miss the stuffed cougette flower appetizer and the pasta with clams or mussels. Save room for dessert and, of course, a limoncello!

CASA E BOTTEGA
Viale Positano, 100
☎ +39 089 875225
www.casaebottegapositano.com
This is the address to head to in Positano for juice, smoothie bowls, and a menu of fresh dishes. Open for breakfast through mid-afternoon, the setting is just as refreshing as the menu, along with tempting ceramics and homeware items for sale in the restaurant's boutique.

LA Pergola
Via del Brigantino, 35/37
☎ +39 089 811461
www.casabottegapositano.it
Located under a shady pergola just steps from the Spiaggia Grande at the base Santa Maria Assunta, this centrally located restaurant is a great choice for a light lunch with a large menu option or leisurely drinks. In the evening, find a cozy corner for a romantic dinner followed by romantic stroll by the sea.

DA FERDINANDO
Via Fornillo, 24
☎ +39 089 875 365
www.facebook.com/daferdinando2018
Head to Fornillo beach and find a table at this tiny beachside restaurant to enjoy freshly prepared local specialities. You can't go wrong with seafood here, especially the marinated anchovies and calamari and shrimp salad. After lunch, lounge on a sunbed by the sea just steps away.

LA Tagliata
Via Tagliata, 32b
☎ +39 089 875872
www.latagliata.com
Escape to the mountain hamlet of Montepertuso above Positano for a very different dining experience. Here the menu is rich with hearty fare like grilled meat, locally made cheese and organic vegetables fresh from the garden terraces nearby. This is the place for local cooking in a rustic setting accompanied by sweeping views.

DON'T MISS

FESTA DEL PESCE
In a town with such a tight connection to the sea (there wasn't even a road until 1888), it's natural to celebrate the local seafood. On the last Saturday in September, Positano throws an extravagant food festival on Fornillo beach for the Festa del Pesce. Locals prepare and serve the seafood and fun is had by all. www.festadelpesce.net

LA MODA POSITANO
Around every corner, I spot boutiques overflowing with clothing in Positano’s iconic style. La moda Positano, or Positano fashion, is an art form in itself – and no less colourful than the town’s artistic past. In a place of creative freedom and invention, it’s no surprise that fashion followed new directions here. In the 1950s and 1960s, Positano’s local style of free-flowing linen, brilliantly hued fabrics, and relaxed chic look was much loved by jet set travellers like Jacqueline Kennedy. Today’s travellers will find plenty of tempting choices while meandering through town.

Boutique Luisa is one Positano’s shops where the history of La moda Positano is woven into the fabric of their designs. The store is named after Luisa, who in the ’60s was a model for some of Positano’s first fashion designers. Eventually she turned her hand to design and opened a boutique of her own with a studio and factory where local artisans crafted each piece utilizing
handmade lace and traditional fabrics. When I stop by to see the latest designs, they always transport me to summer, regardless of the season. I see delicate white lace dresses, patterns that recall the ceramic tradition in Vietri sul Mare, and colours inspired by the Amalfi Coast itself.

Here tradition is a family affair. While Luisa is still occasionally involved with design, her children are following in her footsteps with Boutique Luisa, and they’ve even expanded abroad. From Miami to Dubai, la moda Positano is now sought after around the world.

SEASON BY SEASON
With its beaches and idyllic atmosphere, Positano is above all a town made for relaxation. Two days is plenty to explore the town’s many charms. If you’re staying longer, it’s also a convenient base for day trips to nearby Amalfi Coast towns like Amalfi and Ravello, the former being a 30-minute ferry ride and the latter accessible from Amalfi by bus or taxi. Capri and Sorrento can both be reached by ferry as well, which is by far the most comfortable way to explore the Amalfi Coast area.

Do keep in mind that ferries only run from around Easter through October, and that Positano is a very seasonal destination. During the winter months it’s a sleepy town, with many of the hotels, shops and restaurants closed. Yet even off-season there’s plenty to discover, especially with the maze of staircases and winding pathways to yourself.

When it’s time to board the ferry back to Amalfi, it feels like my vacation has come to an end. Thinking back to Steinbeck’s words, for me it’s the timeless quality of Positano that makes it bite deep. It offers an escape, even if just for a couple of days, to an impossibly beautiful spot. Just beware when you visit that there’s no known cure for the Positano travel bug. One visit will always leave you longing for more.

➤

**BY PLANE**
Fly to Naples. From there you can get a shuttle bus or a taxi to Sorrento. Either way, book ahead, outbound and return. The adventurer’s route would be a bus to Naples, a Circumvesuviana train to Sorrento and then a ferry to Positano.

**GETTING THERE**

**Positano fashion, it's all the rage**