

ANCIENT SITES





Mosaic detail from Pompeii, displayed in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale (p80)

GREGELMS

ANCIENT SITES

Buried for centuries beneath metres of volcanic debris, Naples' archaeological sites are among the best-preserved and most-spectacular Roman ruins in existence.

The views across the Bay of Naples are stunning. From the westernmost tip of Posillipo in Naples you can look east over the entire bay, round to Mt Vesuvius and the Sorrentine Peninsula. And it's here, among the most densely populated towns in Europe, that you'll find Italy's great archaeological sites: Pompeii, Herculaneum and a host of lesser-known jewels.

Two thousand years ago it would all have looked very different. Farmland and forests covered Vesuvius' lower slopes, Herculaneum was a small fishing town and Pompeii an important trading centre; Nero's second wife had a villa in upmarket Oplontis (now decidedly downmarket Torre Annunziata) and aristocrats holidayed in Stabiae (Castellammare di Stabia). It was an area with a lot going for it. That is, until a double whammy of natural disasters struck in the 1st century AD: first an earthquake in AD 62 and then, on 24 August AD 79, Vesuvius erupted.

Much of what we know about the eruption comes from Pliny the Younger's unique eyewitness account. In a letter to the historian Tacitus, he wrote: 'A black and terrible cloud, rent by snaking bursts of fire, gaped open in huge flashes of flames; it was like lightening, but far more extensive.' But it wasn't the lava or the rain of pumice that killed the cowering people of Pompeii; it was a scorching blast of gaseous air off the volcano that killed everything in its path.

Following the eruption the area was largely left to its own devices until the 18th century when it experienced a glorious, if short-lived, resurrection. The Bourbon king Charles VII had a palace built in Portici in 1738 and aristocrats rushed to follow suit by

constructing more than 120 villas, the *Ville Vesuviane* (Vesuvian Villas; see p216), along the so-called *Miglio d'Oro* (Golden Mile) between San Giovanni a Teuuccio and Torre del Greco. To decorate his new palace, Charles had his archaeologists strip Pompeii (discovered in 1748) of its finest murals, mosaics and statues. Thankfully, most were subsequently moved up to Naples where they are now on view at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale (p80).

Of the five major archaeological sites in the Bay of Naples area, Pompeii is the obvious draw card; its majestic remains are a compelling testimony to what was once a tough trading town of 20,000 souls. Herculaneum might be smaller but it is better preserved than its more illustrious neighbour. The 16m of mud that set over the town from the eruption of Vesuvius fossilised everything from fruit and furniture to a library of ancient scrolls and a number of stunning mosaics. Further around the coast, villas unearthed at Torre Annunziata and Castellammare di Stabia stand out among the urban sprawl that stretches almost uninterrupted from Naples to Castellammare.

Pompeii, Herculaneum and Oplontis are within easy walking distance of stations on the Naples-Sorrento Circumvesuviana train line. Stabiae and Boscoreale require a bit more searching out (see the boxed text, below).

Further south, 36km beyond Salerno, the ancient Greek city of Paestum is absolutely worth the effort of getting there. Without any help from Vesuvius, its imperious Greek temples have survived for almost 2750 years.



Sculpture from Casa di Nettuno e Anfitrite (p166)

GREGELMS

VINTAGE VILLAS

Buried beneath the distinctly unlovely streets of Torre Annunziata, Oplontis was once an upmarket seafront suburb under the administrative control of Pompeii. First discovered in the 18th century, it's been left largely untouched; only two of its houses have been unearthed, and only one, Villa Poppaea, is open to the public. This villa is a magnificent example of an *otium* villa (a residential building used for rest and recreation), thought to have belonged to Sabina Poppaea, Nero's second wife. Particularly outstanding are the 1st-century wall paintings in the *triclinium* (dining room) and *calidarium* (hot bathroom) in the west wing. Marking the eastern border of the villa is a garden with a huge swimming pool (17m by 61m). The villa is a straightforward 300m walk from Torre Annunziata Circumvesuviana train station.

South of Oplontis, Stabiae stood on the slopes of the Varano hill overlooking what was then the sea and is now modern Castellammare di Stabia. Here at Stabiae you can visit two villas: the 1st-century-BC Villa Arianna and the larger Villa San Marco, said to measure more than 11,000 sq metres. Neither is in mint condition, but the frescoes in Villa Arianna suggest that it must once have been quite something. Both are accessible by bus from Via Nocera Circumvesuviana station.

Some 3km north of Pompeii, the Antiquarium di Boscoreale is a museum dedicated to Pompeii and its ancient environs. Historical artefacts are combined with life-sized photos and reconstructions to show what the area was like 2000 years ago. To get there, take a bus for Villa Regina from Boscoreale Circumvesuviana station.

All three sites are covered by a single ticket (adult/EU 18yr-25yr/EU under 18yr & over 65yr €5.50/2.75/free), and opening times are standard (🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, last entry 6pm, & 8.30am-5pm Nov-Mar, last entry 3.30pm).

A VOLCANIC LANDSCAPE

Brooding darkly over Naples, Mt Vesuvius (Vesuvio) is not just a monument to past horrors; it's as dangerous today as it was nearly 2000 years ago.

Since the mountain exploded into history in AD 79, burying Pompeii, Herculaneum and much of the surrounding countryside, Vesuvius has erupted more than 30 times. The most devastating of these was in 1631, and the most recent in 1944. And while there's little evidence to suggest any imminent activity, observers continue to worry, noting that the current lull is the longest in the past 500 years.

A full-scale eruption would be catastrophic. Almost three million people currently live in Vesuvius's shadow, 600,000 of these within 7km of the crater. Attempts are being made to relocate those most at risk (see p27), but even with a €30,000 grant on offer few are willing to go. Farmers in particular are reluctant to give up the area's rich volcanic soil, a source of considerable local income.

The area has always been fertile. In ancient times, before the eruption of 79 AD, the slopes of Mt Vesuvius (or Mt Somma as it then was) were planted with cereal crops and fruit orchards, boar flourished in oak woods and thick beech forests covered the mountainside. Aristocratic villas peppered the coastline below.

The mountain itself was once higher than it currently stands, rising to about 3000m rather than the 1281m of today, and had a single summit rather than the current two.

The volcano's massive eruption not only drowned Pompeii in pumice and pushed the coastline back several kilometres, but also destroyed much of the mountain top, creating a huge caldera and a new summit.

Descending the crater of Mt Vesuvius

top five ANCIENT READS

Pompeii: The Living City (2005)
Alex Butterworth & Ray Laurence

Ghosts of Vesuvius: A New Look at the Last Days of Pompeii, How Towers Fell, and Other Strange Connections (2004)
Charles Pellegrino

Pompeii (2004)
Robert Harris

The Lost World of Pompeii (2002)
Colin Amery, Brian Curran, Brian Curran Jr and Chris Caldicott

Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum (1996)
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill

Today, Vesuvius itself is rather better protected than many of the towns beneath it. The **Parco Nazionale del Vesuvio** (www.parco.nazionale.del.vesuvio.it) was established in 1995 and attracts some 600,000 visitors annually. Most make straight for the summit (see the boxed text, below), but if you've got the time (and the legs), there's some interesting walking to be done. Ask for details at the **information centre** (☎ 9am-5.30pm daily) at the summit car park.

About halfway up the hill, the **Museo dell'Osservatorio Vesuviano** (Museum of the Vesuvian Observatory; ☎ 081 610 84 83; www.ov.ingv.it in Italian; admission free; ☎ 10am-2pm Sat & Sun), tells the history of 2000 years of Vesuvius-watching.

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MARTIN MOOS



MARTIN MOOS

VISITING VESUVIUS

The easiest way to visit Vesuvius is to get a bus from Pompeii up to the crater car park. **Vesuviani Mobilità** (☎ 081 963 44 20) operates 10 return-trip buses daily from Piazza Anfiteatro and Piazza Porta Inferiore. The journey time is one hour each way and return tickets cost €8.60.

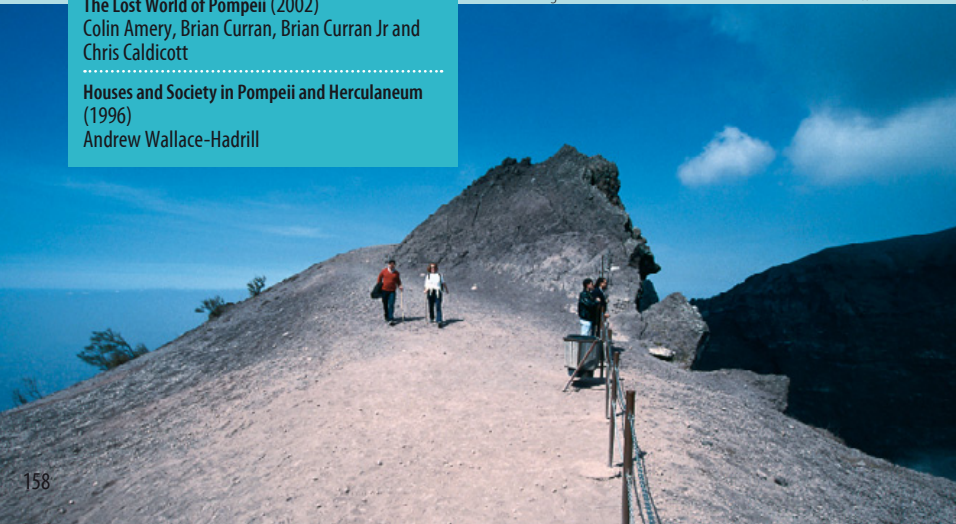
Two of these buses stop in Ercolano, departing from the bus stop on Via Panoramica (about 50m from the Ercolano-Scavi Circumvesuviana train station) at 8.23am and 12.45pm and returning at 1.55pm and 4.30pm. Return tickets are available on board and cost €7.60 for the 90-minute round-trip.

Vesuvio Express (☎ 081 739 36 66; www.vesuvioexpress.it; Piazzale Stazione Circumvesuviana 8) operates minibus-taxis to the summit from outside Ercolano-Scavi station. The ride costs €10 (or €16.50 including crater admission) and buses depart when they are full (or overfull, as is sometimes the case).

If travelling by car, exit the A3 at Ercolano Portico and follow signs for the Parco Nazionale del Vesuvio.

Whether arriving by bus or car, the end of the road is the summit car park (or just before it if you want to avoid the €2.50 parking fee). From here an 860m path leads up to the **crater** (adult/over 65yr/under 8yr €6.50/4.50/free; ☎ 9am-6pm daily Jul-Sep, to 5pm Apr-Jun, to 3pm Oct-Mar; ticket office closes 1hr before the crater). It's not a strenuous walk (allow 35 to 40 minutes), but it's more comfortable in trainers than sandals or flip-flops (thongs). You'd also do well to take sunglasses, which are useful against swirling ash, and a sweater as it can be chilly up top, even in summer.

Note that when weather conditions are bad the summit path is shut and bus departures are suspended.





Along Vicolo di Mercurio, Pompeii

RUSSELL MOUNTFORD

POMPEII

A stark reminder of the malign forces that lie deep inside Vesuvius, Pompeii is Europe's most compelling archaeological site.

A Roman town frozen in its 2000 year-old death throes and conserved under a sea of volcanic pumice, Pompeii (Pompei in Italian) is Italy's top tourist attraction. Each year about 2.5 million visitors pour in to wander the ghostly shell of what was once a thriving commercial centre.

Pompeii's appeal goes beyond tourism; from an archaeological point of view it's priceless. Much of its value lies in the fact that it wasn't simply blown away by Vesuvius, rather it was buried under a layer of *lapilli* (burning fragments of pumice stone), as Pliny the Younger hints at in his celebrated account: 'Darkness came on again, again ashes, thick and heavy. We got up repeatedly to shake these off; otherwise we would have been buried and crushed by the weight.'

But as terrible as the eruption was, it could have been worse. Seventeen years earlier Pompeii had been devastated by an earthquake and much of the 20,000-strong

population had been evacuated. Many had not returned by the time Vesuvius blew but 2000 men, women and children perished nevertheless.

INFORMATION

First aid (☎ 081 535 91 11; Via Colle San Bartolomeo 50)

Police booth Piazza Esedra

Pompeii Sites (www.pompeiiites.org) Comprehensive website covering Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis, Stabiae and the Antiquarium di Boscoreale.

Post office (☎ 081 861 09 58; Piazza Esedra)

Tourist office Porta Marina (☎ 081 850 72 55; Piazza Porta Marina Inferiore 12; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar, 8am-7pm Mon-Fri & 8am-2pm Sat Apr-Sep); Pompeii Town (☎ 081 850 72 55; Via Sacra 1; ☎ as above)



Plaster cast of Pompeii victim

GREG ELMS

The origins of Pompeii are uncertain but it seems likely that it was founded in the 7th century BC by the Campanian Oscans. Over the next seven centuries, the city fell to the Greeks and the Samnites before becoming a Roman colony in 80 BC.

After its catastrophic demise, Pompeii receded from the public eye until 1594 when the architect Domenico Fontana stumbled across the ruins while digging a canal. Exploration proper didn't begin until 1748, however. Work continues today and although new discoveries are being made – a frescoed leisure area was revealed beneath roadworks in 2000 – the emphasis is now on restoring what has already been unearthed rather than raking for new finds.

About 1km down the road from the ruins in the modern town of Pompeii the Santuario della Madonna del Rosario (Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary; p164) is a popular pilgrim destination.

Orientation

The Circumvesuviana train drops you at Pompeii-Scavi-Villa dei Misteri station, beside the main entrance at Porta Marina. Signs direct those arriving by car from the A3 to the *scavi* (excavations) and car parks. Modern Pompeii is 1km away from the station down Via Plinio.

ADMISSION

Entrance Porta Marina; Piazza Anfiteatro

Ticket office (☎ 081 857 53 47; Porta Marina) There is also a ticket office at the Piazza Anfiteatro entrance. **Admission** (adult/EU 18yr-25yr/EU under 18yr & over 65yr €11/5.50/free; combined ticket incl Herculaneum, Oplontis, Stabiae & Boscoreale €20/10/free) Bring a passport or ID card to claim discounts. Take your ticket and get a free map and booklet from the booth to the left of the toilets.

Opening times (☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, last entry 6pm, & 8.30am-5pm Nov-Mar, last entry 3.30pm)

Audioguides (€6.50) There are also special audioguides for children.

TOURS

You'll almost certainly be approached by a guide outside the ticket office. Authorised guides wear identification tags and belong to one of four cooperatives:

Cast (☎ 081 856 42 21)

Casting (☎ 081 850 07 49)

Gata (☎ 081 861 56 61)

Promo Touring (☎ 081 850 88 55)

The official price for a two-hour tour is €100, whether you're alone, in a couple or in a group of up to 25.



GREG ELMS

The Ruins

Of Pompeii's original 66 hectares, 44 have now been excavated. Of course that doesn't mean you'll have unhindered access to every inch of the Unesco-listed site. The situation is a lot better than it used to be, but you're still likely to come across areas cordoned off for no apparent reason, a noticeable lack of clear signs and the odd stray dog. Audioguides are a sensible investment and a good guidebook will also help – try the €8 *Pompeii* published by Electa Napoli.

If visiting in summer, note that there's not much shade on site, so bring a hat, sun block and plenty of water. If you've got small children, try to visit in the early morning or late afternoon when the sun's

not too hot. There's not much you can do about the uneven surfaces, unfortunately, which are a nightmare for strollers.

To do justice to Pompeii you should allow at least three or four hours, longer if you want to go into detail.

At the time of writing, the Casa dei Vettii and Terme del Foro were closed for restoration, and the Terme Suburbane were visitable subject to prior booking at www.arethusa.net. It's in the Terme Suburbane, just outside the city walls, that you'll find the erotic frescoes that so outraged the Catholic Church when they were revealed in 2001. The saucy panels decorate the changing rooms of what was once a private baths complex.

The site's main entrance is at **Porta Marina**, the most impressive of the seven gates that

punctuated the ancient town walls. A busy passageway now as it was then, originally it connected the town with the nearby harbour. Immediately on the right as you enter the gate is the 1st-century BC **Tempio di Venere** (Temple of Venus), formerly one of the town's most opulent temples.

Continuing down Via Marina you come to the **basilica**, the 2nd-century BC seat of the city's law courts and exchange. Opposite the basilica, the **Tempio di Apollo** (Temple of Apollo) is the oldest and most important of Pompeii's religious buildings. Most of what you see today, including the striking columned portico, dates to the 2nd century BC, although fragments remain of an earlier version dating to the 6th century BC. The **grassy foro** (forum) adjacent to the temple was the ancient city's main piazza – a huge traffic-free rectangle flanked by limestone columns.

North of the forum stands the **Tempio di Giove** (Temple of Jupiter), which has one of two flanking triumphal arches remaining, and the **Granai del Foro** (Forum Granary), now used to store hundreds of amphorae and a number of body casts that were made in the late 19th century by pouring plaster into the hollows left by disintegrated bodies. The **macellum** nearby was once the city's main meat and fish market.

From the market head northeast along Via degli Augustali to Vicolo del Lupanare. Halfway down this narrow alley is the **Lupanare**, the city's only dedicated brothel. A tiny two-storey building with five rooms on each floor, it's lined with some of Pompeii's raunchiest frescoes.

At the end of Via dei Teatri, the green **Foro Triangolare** would originally have overlooked the sea and the River Sarno. The main attraction here was, and still is, the 2nd-century BC **Teatro Grande**, a 5000-seat theatre carved into the lava mass on which Pompeii was originally built. Behind the stage, the porticoed **Quadrirportico dei Teatri** was initially used for the audience to stroll between acts, and later as a barracks for gladiators. Next door, the **Teatro Piccolo** (also known as the Odeion) was once an indoor theatre renowned for its acoustics, while the pre-Roman **Tempio di Iside** (Temple of Isis), was a popular place of cult worship.



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Fresco detail from Casa della Venere in Conchiglia WITOLD SKRZYPCZAK

Back on the main thoroughfare of Via dell'Abbondanza, the **Terme Stabiane** is a typical 2nd-century BC bath complex. Entering from the vestibule, bathers would stop off in the vaulted **apodyterium** (changing room) before passing through to the **tepidarium** (warm room) and **caldarium** (hot room).

Towards the northeastern end of Via dell'Abbondanza, **Casa della Venere in Conchiglia** (House of the Venus Marina) has recovered well from the WWII bomb that damaged it in 1943. Although unexceptional from the outside, it houses a lovely peristyle that looks onto a small, manicured garden. It's here in the garden that you'll find the striking Venus fresco after which the house is named.

The grassy **anfiteatro** nearby is the oldest known Roman amphitheatre in existence. Built in 70 BC, it was at one time capable of holding up to 20,000 bloodthirsty spectators. Over the way, the **Grande Palestra** is an athletics field with an impressive portico and, at its centre, the remains of a swimming pool.

From here, double back along Via dell'Abbondanza and turn right into Via Stabiana to see some of Pompeii's grandest houses. Turn left into Via della Fortuna and then right down Vicolo del Labirinto to get to **Vicolo di Mercurio** and the entrance to **Casa del Fauno** (House of the Faun), Pompeii's largest private house. Named after the small bronze statue in the **impluvium** (rain tank), it was here that early excavators found Pompeii's greatest mosaics, most of which are now in Naples' Museo Archeologico Nazionale (p78). A couple of blocks away, the **Casa del Poeta Tragico** (House of the Tragic



SANTUARIO DELLA MADONNA DEL ROSARIO

Dominating modern Pompeii's centre, the **Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rosary** (☎ 081 857 71 11; Piazza Bartolo Longo; 🕒 6.15am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 5.45am-8.30pm Sun) was consecrated in 1891, some 15 years after the miracle that guaranteed its fame. In 1876 a young girl was cured of epilepsy after praying in front of the painting, *Virgin of the Rosary with Child*, which hangs above the main altar. News spread rapidly and to this day the painting is the subject of popular devotion.

The Santuario is flanked by a freestanding 80m **campanile** (bell tower; ☎ 081 850 70 00; 🕒 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat-Thu).

Poet) features one of the world's first 'Beware of the Dog' – *Cave Canem* – warnings. To the north, the **Casa dei Vettii** on Vicolo di Mercurio is home to a famous depiction of Priapus whose oversized phallus balances on a pair of scales (see image on p45).

From here follow the road west and turn right into Via Consolare, which takes you out of the town through **Porta Ercolano**. Continue past **Villa di Diomede** and you'll come to **Villa dei Misteri**, one of the most complete structures left standing in Pompeii. The *Dionysiac Frieze*, the most important fresco still on site, spans the walls of the large dining room. One of the largest paintings from the ancient world, it depicts the initiation of a bride-to-be into the cult of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine.

Sleeping & Eating

There's really no great need to stay over night in Pompeii. It's easily visited on a day trip from Naples, Sorrento or Salerno, and once the excavations close, the area around the site becomes decidedly seedy.

Most of the restaurants near the ruins are large, characterless affairs set up for feeding coach-loads of tourists. Wander down to the modern town and it's a little better, with a couple of decent restaurants serving excellent local food.

If you need a bite on site, there is a perfectly good **canteen** (Via di Mercurio; meals around €18) near the Tempio di Giove (see p162).

AL GAMBERONE TRATTORIA €

☎ 081 850 68 14; Via Piave 36; meals about €17; 🕒 Wed-Mon

Not far from Pompeii's landmark Santuario, this modest trattoria serves great food at honest prices. There's nothing particularly elaborate on the menu, just old favourites such as roast chicken and veg or *risotto pescatore* (seafood risotto).

RISTORANTE IL PRINCIPE RISTORANTE €€€

☎ 081 850 55 66; Piazza B Longo 8; meals around €70; 🕒 daily Apr-Oct, Tue-Sat & lunch only Mon Nov-Mar

One of the top restaurants in the area, the Michelin-starred Prince specialises in historical local food. On your plate this translates to dishes such as spaghetti with *garum* (a strong Roman fish seasoning) or the restaurant's signature cassata cake, a rich ricotta affair inspired by a fresco in Oplontis (see p157).

RISTORANTE LUCULLUS RISTORANTE €€

☎ 081 861 30 55; Via Plinio 129; pizzas from €6, meals around €22; 🕒 Wed-Mon

One of the better restaurants near the ruins, Lucullus is a good choice for pizza (count on all the usual toppings), pasta and meat classics such as *tagliatelle alla bolognese*, and risotto ai funghi porcini (risotto with mushroom). Vegetarians can go mad at the vast choice of mix-and-match contorni (vegetables).

Getting There & Away

The easiest way to get to Pompeii is by **Circumvesuviana** train. There are regular trains to Pompeii-Scavi-Villa dei Misteri station from Naples (€2.30, 40 minutes, about 30 daily) and Sorrento (€1.80, 30 minutes, about 30 daily). To get to Herculaneum from Pompeii, take the train for Naples and get off at Ercolano-Scavi station (€1.30).

SITA (☎ 199 73 07 49; www.sita-on-line.it in Italian) operates half-hourly buses to and from Naples (€2.30, 35 minutes), while **CSTP** (☎ 089 48 70 01; www.cstp.it in Italian) bus 50 runs to and from Salerno (€1.80, one hour, 15 daily). **Marozzi** (☎ 089 87 10 09; www.marozzi.it in Italian) has a daily bus to and from Rome (€16, three hours).

Travelling by car, your best bet is to take the A3 from Naples. Look for the Pompeii exit and follow the signs to Pompeii Scavi. Car parks (approximately €4 per hour) are clearly marked and vigorously toured.

HERCULANEUM

Overshadowed by Pompeii, Herculaneum would elsewhere be the star of the show.

Buried under 16m of mud, Herculaneum is a minefield of archaeological treasures, from papyrus scrolls to mosaics, boats and skeletons. A superbly conserved Roman fishing town, it's smaller and less daunting than Pompeii (4.5 hectares as compared to Pompeii's 44), allowing you to visit without that nagging thought that you're bound to miss something important.

In contrast to modern Ercolano, an uninspiring Neapolitan suburb 12km south-east of Naples proper, classical Herculaneum was a peaceful fishing and port town of about 4000 inhabitants, and something of a resort for wealthy Romans and Campanians.

Its fate runs parallel to that of Pompeii. Destroyed by an earthquake in AD 62, it was completely submerged in the AD 79 eruption of Mt Vesuvius. Herculaneum is much closer to the volcano than Pompeii, so it drowned in a 16m-thick sea of mud that essentially fossilised the city. This meant that even delicate items, such as furniture and clothing, were discovered remarkably well preserved. Tragically, the inhabitants didn't fare so well; thousands of people tried to escape by boat but were suffocated by the volcano's poisonous gases.

The town was rediscovered in 1709 and amateur excavations were carried out intermittently until 1874, with many finds being carted off to Naples to decorate the houses of the well-to-do or to end up in museums. Serious archaeological work began again in 1927 and continues to this day, although with much of the ancient site buried beneath modern Ercolano it's slow going.

Orientation & Information

From the **Circumvesuviana** Ercolano-Scavi station, it's a simple 500m downhill walk to the ruins – follow the signs for the *scavi* (excavations) down the main street,

Via IV Novembre. En route you'll pass the **tourist office** on your right.

Herculaneum is much easier to navigate than Pompeii and can be done so with a map and audioguide. Pick up a free map and guide booklet from the **site information office** next to the **ticket office** before heading down the wide boulevard to the ruin's actual entrance, which is on the right shortly after the road curves.

On sale at the bookshop beside the exit, you'll find *Herculaneum, The Excavations, Local History & Surroundings* (€7), published by Electra, which provides a good historical insight into the town.

INFORMATION

Pompeii Sites (www.pompeisites.org) Comprehensive website covering Pompeii, Herculaneum, Oplontis, Stabiae and the Antiquarium di Boscoreale.

Site information office (🕒 8.30am-3pm)

Tourist office (☎/fax 081 788 12 43; Via IV Novembre 82; 🕒 9am-2.45pm Mon-Sat)



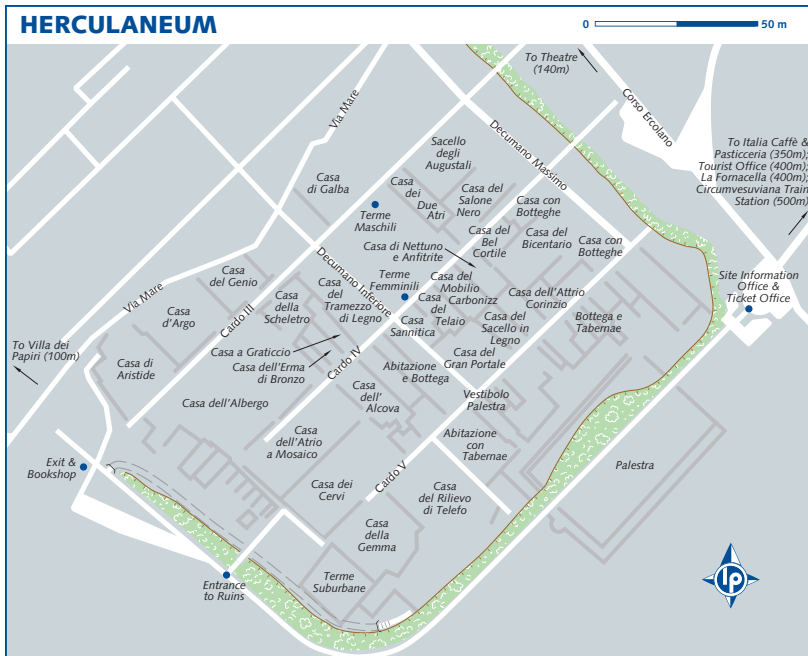
ADMISSION

Ticket office (☎ 081 739 09 63)

Admission (adult/EU 18yr-25yr/EU under 18yr & over 65yr €11/5.50/free, combined ticket incl Pompeii, Oplontis, Stabiae & Boscoreale €20/10/free) Bring a passport or ID card to claim discounts.

Opening times (🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar, last entry 90 min before closing)

Audioguides (€6.50) There are also special audioguides for children.



The Ruins

The ruins are easily visited in a leisurely morning. Navigation is easy: the site is divided into 11 *insulae* (islands) carved up in a classic Roman grid pattern with Decumano Massimo and Decumano Inferiore running horizontally and Cardos III, IV and V vertically.

Note that at any given time some houses will invariably be shut for restoration; at the time of writing these included the Terme Suburbane and the Casa dell'Attrio a Mosaico.

To enter the ruins you pass through what appears to be a moat around the town but is in fact the ancient shoreline. It was here in 1980 that archaeologists discovered some 300 skeletons, the remains of a crowd that had fled to the beach only to be overcome by the terrible heat of surge clouds sweeping down from Vesuvius.

Marking the sites' southernmost tip the 1st-century AD Terme Suburbane (Suburban Baths) is one of the best preserved bath complexes in existence, with deep pools,

stucco friezes and bas-reliefs looking down upon marble seats and floors.

Nearby, and accessible from Cardo V, Casa dei Cervi (House of the Deers) is an imposing example of a Roman noble family's house. The two-storey villa, built around a central courtyard, contains murals and some beautiful still-life paintings. In the courtyard is a diminutive pair of marble deer assailed by dogs, and an engaging statue of a peeing Hercules.

Continuing up Cardo V, turn left into Decumano Inferiore for the Casa del Gran Portale (House of the Large Portal), named after the elegant brick Corinthian columns that flank its main entrance. Inside you'll find some well-preserved wall paintings.

To the southwest the Casa dell'Attrio a Mosaico (House of the Mosaic Atrium) on Cardo IV is an impressive mansion with extensive floor mosaics, although time and nature have left the floor buckled and uneven. Particularly noteworthy is the black-and-white chessboard mosaic in the atrium.

For even more impressive mosaics head up Cardo IV to the Casa di Nettuno e Anfritrite

VILLA DEI PAPIRI

The Villa dei Papiri (Villa of the Papyri) was the most luxurious villa in Herculaneum. Owned by Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, Julius Caesar's father-in-law, it was a vast four-storey, 245m-long complex stretching down to the sea; there were swimming pools, fountains and a collection of up to 80 sculptures. There was also an important library and it is the 1800 papyrus scrolls found there that gave the villa its name.

Most of the carbonised scrolls, now in Naples' Museo Archeologico Nazionale (p78) contain works by the minor Epicurean philosopher Philodemus (multispectral imaging has enabled scholars to decipher the writing on the blackened papyrus), although researchers still hope to find writings by Aristotle, Livy and Sappho among the thousands still to be recovered.

Excavation work on the villa has been continuing on and off since 1765 – in the 1990s two new floors were revealed – yet up to 2800 sq m remain to be explored. At the time of writing, work was at a halt subject to the outcome of a feasibility report, even though financing has already been secured – the American millionaire David W Packard (of Hewlett-Packard fame) has promised to pay for any further excavations.

To visit the villa, of which only the atrium and parts of the upper floors are open to the public, you need to book ahead. The easiest way to do so is to go online at www.arethusa.net. Visits are limited to groups of 25 people on Saturdays and Sundays between 9am and 5pm.

(House of Neptune & Amphitrite). This aristocratic house takes its name from the extraordinary mosaic in the *nymphaeum* (fountain and bath), depicting Neptune and Amphitrite. The warm colours in which the two deities are depicted hint at how lavish the original interior must once have been.

Over the road, the Terme Femminili was the women's section of the Terme del Foro (Forum Baths) – the male half, the Terme Maschili, is accessible from Cardo III. While women passed from the *apodyterium* (note the finely executed naked figure of Triton adorning the mosaic floor) through the *tepidarium* to the *caldarium*, men had the added bracing option of the *frigidarium* (cold bath). You can still see the benches where bathers sat and the wall shelves for their clothing.

At the northeastern end of Cardo IV, along Decumano Massimo, a crucifix found in an upstairs room of the Casa del Bicentenario (Bicentenary House) provides possible evidence of a Christian presence in pre-Vesuvius Herculaneum.

Virtually the last house on Cardo III before the exit, the noble Casa d'Argo (Argus House) would originally have opened onto Cardo II (as yet unearthed). Onto its porticoed, palm-treed garden open a *triclinium* and other residential rooms.

North of the ruins along Corso Ercolano are the remains of a theatre, dating from the Augustan period, and the Villa dei Papiri are to the northwest (see above).

Sleeping & Eating

As with Pompeii, you're unlikely to want to stay over night at Ercolano – there's not much to see other than the ruins, and it's an easy rail journey from Naples or Sorrento. There are a couple of places to grab a bite.

ITALIA CAFFÈ & PASTICCERIA CAFÉ €

☎ 081 732 14 99; Corso Italia 17; snacks from €3
Just off Via IV Novembre, this run-of-the-mill café serves refreshing *granite* (flavoured ice drinks), decent coffee and great cakes. Pick up a snack for your journey or sit and munch on the pavement seats.

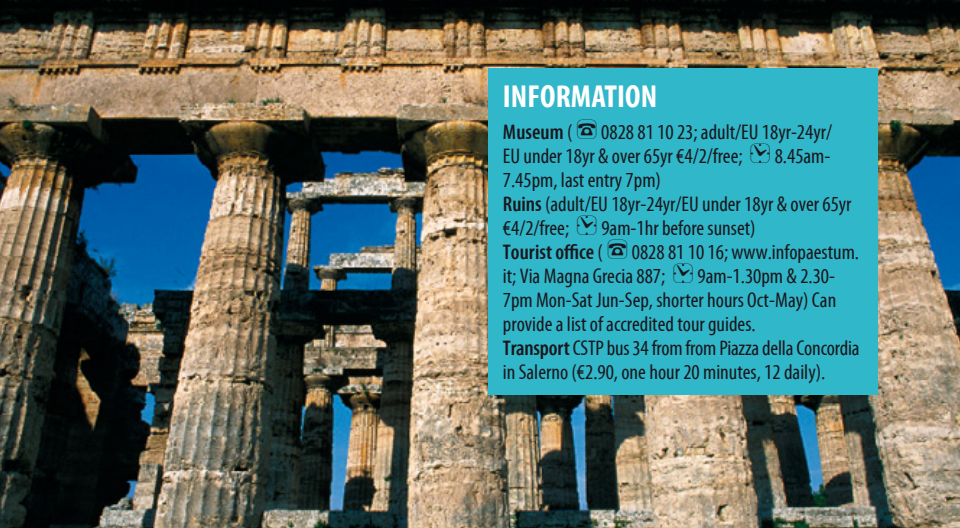
LA FORNACELLA RISTORANTE €

☎ 081 777 48 61; Via IV Novembre 90-92; set menu €7
Touristy and not very inviting, La Fornacella nevertheless dishes up pretty good food. The lunchtime menu (pasta, main course and side dish) is good value at €7, with dishes like *pollo alla cacciatora* (chicken baked with tomatoes and paprika) and fresh grilled vegetables. If you really want to fill up fast, grab a couple of wedges of fried spaghetti with tomato.

Getting There & Away

By far the easiest way to get to Ercolano from Naples or Sorrento is by the Circumvesuviana train (get off at Ercolano-Scavi station). Trains run regularly throughout the day and single tickets cost €1.70 to and from Naples, €1.30 for Pompeii and €1.80 for Sorrento.

If you're driving from Naples, take the A3 and exit at Ercolano Portico, and following the signs to car parks near the site's entrance.



INFORMATION

Museum (☎ 0828 81 10 23; adult/EU 18yr-24yr/EU under 18yr & over 65yr €4/2/free; 🕒 8.45am-7.45pm, last entry 7pm)

Ruins (adult/EU 18yr-24yr/EU under 18yr & over 65yr €4/2/free; 🕒 9am-1hr before sunset)

Tourist office (☎ 0828 81 10 16; www.infopaestum.it; Via Magna Grecia 887; 🕒 9am-1.30pm & 2.30-7pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, shorter hours Oct-May) Can provide a list of accredited tour guides.

Transport CSTP bus 34 from from Piazza della Concordia in Salerno (€2.90, one hour 20 minutes, 12 daily).

Tempio di Nettuno, Paestum

ROBERTO SANCIN GEROMETTA

PAESTUM

Paestum's unforgettable Unesco-listed temples are among the best-preserved monuments of Magna Graecia, the Greek colony that once covered much of southern Italy.

Paestum, or Poseidonia as the city was originally called (in honour of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea), was founded in the 6th century BC by Greek settlers and fell under Roman control in 273 BC. Decline later set in following the demise of the Roman Empire. Savage raids by the Saracens and periodic outbreaks of malaria forced the ever-dwindling population to abandon the city altogether. Its temples were rediscovered in the late 18th century but the site as a whole wasn't unearthed until the 1950s.

The first temple you meet on entering the site from the northern end is the 6th-century-BC **Tempio di Cerere** (Temple of Ceres). Originally dedicated to Athena, it served as a Christian church in medieval times.

As you head south you can pick out the basic outline of the large rectangular forum, the heart of the ancient city. Among the partially standing buildings are the vast

domestic housing area and, further south, the amphitheatre.

The **Tempio di Nettuno** (Temple of Neptune), dating from about 450 BC, is the largest and best preserved of the three temples at Paestum; only parts of its inside walls and roof are missing. Almost next door, the so-called **basilica** (in fact, a temple to the goddess Hera) is Paestum's oldest surviving monument. Dating from the middle of the 6th century BC, it's a magnificent sight with nine columns across and 18 along the sides.

Just east of the site, the **museum** houses a collection of much-weathered metopes (bas-relief friezes). This collection includes 33 of the original 36 metopes from **Tempio di Argiva Hera** (Temple of Argive Hera), situated 9km north of Paestum, of which virtually nothing else remains. The star exhibit, however, is the 5th-century BC frescoes *Tomba del Truffatore* (Tomb of the Diver), whose depiction of a diver in mid-air is thought to represent the passage from life to death.

There are various restaurants on site, of which the best is the **Ristorante Nettuno** (☎ 0828 81 10 28; Via Principe di Piemonte; meals around €25) near the southern entrance. Alternatively you can buy some mozzarella from the nearby **La Fattoria del Casaro** (☎ 0828 72 27 04; Via Licinella 5).

For a place to stay, **Hotel Villa Rita** (☎ 0828 81 10 81; www.hotelvillarita.it; s/d incl breakfast €62/88; 🍽️ 🚿) has comfortable three-star rooms and a swimming pool in its own verdant grounds.

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