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Sorrento

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Perched on the jutting ankle bone of south western Italy, Sorrento is the embodiment of a European coastal resort. The mild climate and breathtaking scenery has been wowing tourists for over 200 years, but with so much competition in today's holiday market, what is it that sets Sorrento head and shoulders above the rest? It surely must be more than the high heel of Italy's kinky boot.

A stones throw (50km) from Naples, Sorrento is a perfectly situated base for visiting all the attractions of the rugged Italian peninsula and even parts of the Amalfi coast. Amalfi, Positano, Capri, Ischia and Ercolano are all within easy travelling distance, with trains, buses, taxis and boats all very reasonably priced.

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Using a fast boat from Sorrento harbour, a trip to Capri will take roughly 20 minutes and is the perfect day trip and shoppers heaven. Cut price designer label stores rub shoulders with postcard shops, tacky tourist merchandise vendors and enough cafés to fill even the most voracious appetite. Even when the streets are jam-packed with tourists and merchants hawking their wares, the scenery is staggeringly beautiful and if you slip away from the beaten track you should be able to find a quiet corner to enjoy the view.

History isn't really a very large part of any visit to Sorrento, with the only figures of noteworthy proportions to do anything in the city being Wagner and Nietzsche, who had a very well publicised argument here, and Ibsen, who wrote part of "Peer Gynt" whilst staying in Sorrento. However, one area of obvious historical significance to anyone visiting Sorrento, is the ominous looming of Mount Vesuvius in the distance and the proximity of Pompeii, only 21km to the north.



Whether or not history is your bag, Pompeii is definitely worth a visit, if only to be able to take in the sheer force of a volcanic eruption. It is impossible to visit this place and not be impressed. Inevitably, with the smell of money that the tourists have brought with them, has come commercialisation, as with just about every other tourist attraction in the world. Some may find this just a little distasteful, after all, money is being made from what, essentially, was the horrifically painful death of many hundreds of people. However, voyeurism is an integral, if somewhat tacky, part of human nature and once there you'll find yourself in car crash mode – somewhat disgusted, yet transfixed and unable to look away. (NB; keep your eyes peeled and you might just find yourself some Roman porn – these people were obsessed by the phallus and, if the art work is to be believed, had the biggest... ego's you'll ever come across!)

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The only problem with eating out in Sorrento is that you're spoilt for choice. Restaurants are two-a-penny and all are reasonably priced. However, you would do well to avoid the more touristy areas, where service can be slow and food below par. If you're looking for a really top quality establishment, you couldn't do much better than L'Antica Trattoria a short distance from the Piazza Tasso (the centre of town), on Via P. R. Giuliani. The atmosphere is perfect, the service friendly and prompt and the food, well, words fail me. Without sounding pretentious, the food is exquisite and all diets are catered for.

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Accommodation in Sorrento is plentiful, with options to suit almost any budget, but if you're going to visit Italy, you may as well do it in style, and there is no where more stylish than the Grand Hotel Cocumella. Part of the Small Luxury Hotel group, Cocumella is certainly deserving of distinction. However, with prices ranging from €285 for an off-peak standard double room to €646 for a suite during peak season (full breakfast included) the Cocumella is probably not the place to go for a cheep and cheerful weekend away. Having said that, the standard room is on a par with your average hotel's suite, so if you're looking for something that little bit special, this might be the place for you (The Cocumella also offers the services of the tall ship Vera for trips out to Positano and Capri. A full, high quality lunch is served on board and given the right weather it makes for a truly memorable experience. Prices vary depending on your route. An excellent restaurant is also available on the hotel grounds.)



For more details on the Grand Hotel Cocumella visit [www.cocumella.com](http://www.cocumella.com) or contact Small Luxury Hotels on 0800 525 48000 or [www.slh.com](http://www.slh.com)

For those of you to whom money is a little more of an object, there are many more affordable forms of accommodation, starting at €12.91 per night, including breakfast, at the youth hostel in Vita degli Aranci. Despite the abundance of lower-priced hotels, it is advisable to book in advance during peak season.

The one area that Sorrento is lacking to make it the perfect holiday destination, is a good old fashioned beach. But, if you can make do with small strips of sand here and there and the odd pebbly beach, Sorrento, really, has it all. With sweeping cliff-top scenery, sultry Mediterranean weather, and Mount Vesuvius beckoning seductively in the distance, there is no better place to spend a romantic weekend away. Shops by the armful and day trips aplenty provide entertainment for tourists with even the shortest attention span without taking away any of the serenity of Sorrento. For a weekend break or a longer summer holiday, Sorrento certainly gets my vote.

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Both Easyjet ([www.easyjet.co.uk](http://www.easyjet.co.uk)) and BMI ([www.flybmi.com](http://www.flybmi.com)) fly to Naples. Naples is less than 20 miles away from Sorrento and there are regular buses which won't det you back too much

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