

TRAVEL

How slow can you go?

ROADTRIP / ITALY

Residents of the Italian region of Cilento don't conform to an abstemious model of living well: here, they drink, eat heartily and stay up late. But the area has one of the world's highest concentrations of centenarians. We take a roadtrip through the region that created the Mediterranean diet to find out what a slower pace of life really looks (and tastes) like.

By Laura Rysman Photography Andrea Pugliotto

**Getting here**

The Cilento peninsula is on the Campania coast, south of Amalfi. Trains arrive from Naples at several stations, including the Pisciotta-Palainuro and Paestum station, just a short walk from the Greek temples.

Address book**EAT AND DRINK**

Casa di Della
Home-cooking at its deep-fried best. *Strada Statale 267, 620, 84068, Pioppi*

Malabar

The evolution of Cilento's cuisine, with plenty of international flair. *Piazza Michelangelo Pugno, 84066 Pisciotta*

Perbacco

A Slow Food institution in an olive grove. *perbacco.it*

Cantina San Giovanni

A seafood organic vineyard offering tastings and a cottage for guests. *agricolasangiovanni.it*

Tenuta Vannulo

Fresh mozzarella at a farm where buffaloes receive massages. *vannulo.it*

Donatella Marino

Anchovy preserves made in the *menaica* tradition. *aliciamenaica.it*

Rodyum

Olive oil of the local Pisciottana variety. *rodyum.it*

STAY**Il Cannito**

A family-run guesthouse set amid the region's endless nature. *ilcannito.com*

Marulivo

In Pisciotta's centre, a terrace-blessed former monastery-turned-hotel. *marulivohotel.it*

Santo Mercurio

A country hotel that neighbours Perbacco. *santomercurio.com*

Residenza la Francesca Sud

Camping grounds in the woods offering 1960s-era Minoline cabins designed by architect Giulio Minolotti. *lafrancescasud.it*

DO AND SEE:**Cooperativa Cilento Mare**

Fairly priced boat trips with retired fishermen to visit isolated beaches, see the coast or eat a dinner of fresh seafood. *coopcilentomare.com*

Arco Naturale di Palinuro

Stunning rock formations along a sandy beach. *Palinuro coast, Centola*

Costa del Cilento

A newly opened hiking trail that connects sokm of paths following the sea. *sentieridocilento.it*



- (1) Map of the Cilento region
- (2) Ancient temple in Paestum
- (3) Back office in Perbacco restaurant
- (4) View of Pisciotta
- (5) Exploring the dramatic rocky cliffs by boat
- (6) Donatella Marino, owner of Alici di Menaica (on left), with her daughter
- (7) Wild coastline

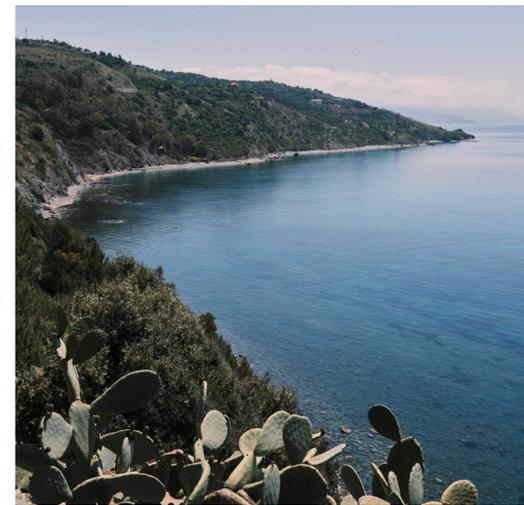
- (8) Fresh flavours at Malabar
- (9) Anchovies at Perbacco
- (10) Antonio Palmieri, owner of Vannulo farm in Paestum

oil, fish (such as anchovies), craft cheese and meat that is served only on rare occasions. The Keys relocated to the Cilento fishing village of Pioppo, hoping to extend their own lives. They managed to reach the ages of 100 and 97, respectively.

Pisciotta's Perbacco restaurant isn't the only place in the area that's inspiring a new generation of food folk. Another example is Malabar, a culinary destination in a postcard-pretty piazza where Joar Torch, a 29-year-old Swedish chef who grew up spending summers at his family's home here, devises ambitious recipes with home-grown ingredients. "The custom remains that you know the producer and origin of your ingredients," says Torch. He also incorporates approaches that he gleaned from his experiences cooking in Stockholm and New York, and many of his dishes have levels of acidity, smoke, fermentation and spice that aren't commonly found in Cilento's cuisine. "I like to have layers of flavour with an element of surprise," he says.

There is an upwelling of pride among the producers too, including those who returned here from big cities after lockdowns, some with help from EU agricultural funds and notions of becoming newly minted vegetable farmers, herb growers, vintners or cheese-makers. Some even became distillers, such as the makers of Note Alcoliche, a digestif made with white fig and wild fennel. There was succession as well as success: Angelo Di Blasi, now the maker of Rodyum olive oil, took over from his parents at the age of 23 and says that it's time for a "cosmopolitan Cilento" to bloom and grow.

Paestum, a town with stunningly intact Greek temples, is a lofty nod to Cilento's roots as a colony of Magna Graecia, a link that can still be seen in the region's culinary culture. Food production, as much by luck as by design, continues to exist at a scale that is small enough to protect the equilibrium of nature. Fishermen



intimate and welcoming accommodation of places such as Il Cannito, a family-run guesthouse in a 13th-century stone building near Paestum. Nicola Gorga is in the kitchen, cooking dinner every night for the people in the four guestrooms, while his twin sister, Antonella, welcomes visitors and oversees the operations here and at their Maremirilli beach club. "It's all born of family love and an irreplaceable desire to carry on our traditions," she says of the space, which plans to host an artist residency.

Housed in a former monastery in Pisciotta, Hotel Marulivo has a rooftop terrace that has one of the best sea views in Cilento. "A city renders you anonymous but here everyone knows each other," says owner Lea Pinto, who left Rome and a job as an architect for a quieter life

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on the coast with her husband. "To be able to put down roots in a small community like this is a boon that makes all of life easier to handle."

The science of the Mediterranean diet attempts to enumerate the ingredients that make for a robust life but it tends to neglect some of the method: passing time with friends, maintaining a sense of belonging, enjoying freedom from the stress of excessive ambition and a more harmonious relationship with nature. Aside from tabletops decked with wine, mozzarella, anchovies and fresh vegetables, a fixture in Cilento is the outdoor get-together, often of older people who hunch together on piazza benches or plastic chairs. "Playing cards every evening is part of our culture," says one punter. "The piazza is the living room of the whole town." The slower pace of life allows kinship and familiarity to form. This is a place where conversations are easy to start and difficult to end.

At a different beachside game of cards on another night an elderly man tells MONOCLE, "In America they have no quality of life because they only have money on their mind. Here we prefer the *vaffa*." That's the "whatever" mindset, to translate it politely.