



The Road Less Traveled Revealed the World of Ischia

After her travel plans were thwarted, this writer found a delicious new wine world



By Regine T Rousseau | July 29, 2022



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There are two types of travelers: people like Dave, and my kind. Dave was a 73-year-old man I met on the flight to Naples, Italy, who pinned me into the window seat with his oversized personal bag filled with books, printed articles, and notepads containing all of his research on Italy. As a young man, he had dreamed of seeing Pompeii, and the Vatican in Rome, and eating “real” pizza. Yet he hadn’t traveled more

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than a few miles from his hometown of Cedar Rapids, Iowa except for that time his friend took him to Hawaii. His wife, 74 years old, was next to him. Like Dave, this would be her first trip out of the U.S. For them, nothing on this trip was left to chance. Every minute of every day of this trip had been researched, planned, and imagined.

And then there's me. I am more of a "let's see what comes up," type of traveler. In 2015, I saw a postcard at a Borders bookstore in downtown Chicago. The photo was of a coastal town with houses stacked on steep cliffs. Every color in the world was in that photo: terracotta rooftops and homes painted in bright yellow, soft red, tangerine, and cottage blue. And where man failed to add a hue, nature showed up with electric pink flowers, a sea with streaks of purple, bottle green grass, and a sky that reflected this rainbow. I picked up the card and read "Amalfi Coast" on the lower right-hand corner, looked at my then boyfriend, and said, "Amalfi Coast, I gotta go. My destiny is on the Amalfi Coast." He shook his head, smiled, and said, "OK, baby."

And that's how I discovered a new favorite wine.

Accepting new directions

Embracing your destiny is not always easy. Thanks to my busy travel schedule, timing issues, and the sheer difficulty of getting to the Amalfi Coast, it took another four years before I could make the journey. I began making plans to visit in late June of 2019. July is the busy season, and so finding accommodations in any of the three main towns of Positano, Ravello or Sorrento was impossible. It looked as if my trip would be postponed unless we slept on the beach. Then my travel companion read about an island in the Gulf of Naples, north of the Amalfi Coast, named Ischia.

"How about we go to Ischia?"

"My destiny is on the Amalfi Coast."

"The rooms are currently \$700 a night. You can't afford your destiny."

For the past four years, I had been dreaming of walking the streets, eating the food, and soaking in the luxury of the Amalfi Coast. But when I learned that the island is a famous wine region, [Ischia DOC](#), I warmed to the idea, and we booked a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea for \$187 a night.

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Regine Rousseau in Ischia, Italy. Photo courtesy of Regine Rousseau.

To get to the island, you fly into Naples and take a ferry. The scenes at the port of Ischia could fill an art gallery. A man in his late twenties in a red shirt, with wild curly onyx-colored hair, dramatically waved his arms like an inflatable tube man, to usher our boat to the dock. Another in his early seventies with tanned and leathered skin sat dangerously close to where we docked, reading a book with a worn bright green cover. A girl dressed in a soft pink summer dress ran screaming into a woman's arms when she debarked.

Our Airbnb was a short ten-minute walk from the port. We passed a small grocery store and decided to stop, still carrying two large suitcases. Unpacking requires wine.

Into a new world of wine

I am no Dave and while I didn't do extensive research about the island, I did a deep dive into the wines. There have been vines on the island since 700 BC, including the Forastera and Biancolella grapes that produce high acid white wines. Ischia also produces excellent reds, or Rossi, made from a blend of Piediroso and Guarnaccia, among others. My mission was to try as many as possible in three

days. We picked up a few bottles of [Tommasone Per E Palummo](#) from the market to start.

We experienced all that the island had to offer; we went to [Giardini Poseidon Thermal Spa](#), shopped in the charming town, and sipped Limoncello. And, yes, we took a ferry to the Amalfi Coast for an amazing lunch at [Da Adolfo](#) on the beach in Positano. The Amalfi Coast is bustling with tourists and filled with life. I am sure I will visit again but the impact I anticipated didn't happen. Surprisingly the place that affected me deeply was Ischia. The thing that I needed was stillness.

I found happiness on the tiny balcony of our Airbnb. The view in the early morning was a prayer released sweetly in shades of blue, that spread from beneath us till the end of the earth. Our two-hour breakfast was a meditation, filled with laughter and stories that could only be shared in a place of peace. We feasted on warm buttery baked goods, milk in a glass bottle, chilled Bianco spumante, fresh yogurt, homemade granola, and ripe fruit served with a single red flower strategically arranged to receive hearts on the Gram.

In the evening we ate what would, if given a choice, be my last supper — a well-appointed charcuterie board. Our plates were full of glorious local cheeses, charcuterie, and cherry tomatoes so sweet and tangy that they required no salt, vinegar, or olive oil. And we drank bottles of vibrant white wines and calming reds from Isola d'Ischia. I created my own postcard moments.

3 wines from Ischia to try:

Casa d'Ambra Ischia Biancolella (~\$26)

The nose on this white wine smells of a spring morning; white flowers and ripe apples. The palate is rich and silky with flavors of apples and lemons. A perfect pairing to a lazy afternoon sunbathing.

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Tommasone Ischia Per'e Palummo



Red (~\$13)

Made from the Piediroso, or Pèr e Palummo, grape. This wine is full-bodied with smooth tannins. Fruity with intense black and red berry flavors and spicy pepper notes. The intensity is balanced with fresh acidity that makes the wine elegant enough to sip from midday to sundown. I recommend chilling it for 20-30 minutes.

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Marisa Cuomo Costa d'Amalfi Furore Rosso (~\$27)

A blend of Aglianico and Piediroso grapes. This wine is luscious and structured, with tons of black and blueberry flavors blended with black licorice. It also has the typical peppery spiciness.

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