

# ITALY'S AMALFI COAST

by Ted Cookson

The Amalfi Coast on the southern part of the Sorrento Peninsula is one of the prettiest areas in Italy. The Amalfi Drive, hugging the coast of the Campania region along the Gulf of Salerno, has been called Italy's most romantic road. This narrow, winding cliff-hanging byway, in places carved right out of the side of the mountain, is a challenge to navigate. However, those traversing the Amalfi

Drive are rewarded with spectacular views of small coves and of boats bobbing in the azure sea far below. Amalfi and Positano are the two most popular spots along the Amalfi Coast.

Amalfi, 61 km (38 miles) east of Sorrento and with a population of only 5,500, is the largest town on this coast. Dramatically situated at the mouth of a ravine under towering 1,315-meter (4,312-foot) Mt. Cerreto, the burg is sandwiched between tall



Small cove with beach



Amalfi from the sea

cliffs and a rocky coastline broken occasionally by coves with sandy beaches.

Amalfi's rich history is not evident from what tourists see today. Incredibly, this small town was once the capital of the seafaring Republic of Amalfi, one of the great maritime powers. From the ninth to the eleventh century Amalfi rivaled Venice

and Genoa for influence in the Mediterranean.

The first mention of Amalfi dates from the sixth century, and a circular maritime trade with the East developed soon thereafter. Grain, slaves, salt and timber were traded to Egypt and Syria for gold dinars. These coins were then paid to the Byzantines for silk which was in turn sold back in



Art for sale in Positano



Local lemons



Watercolors in Positano

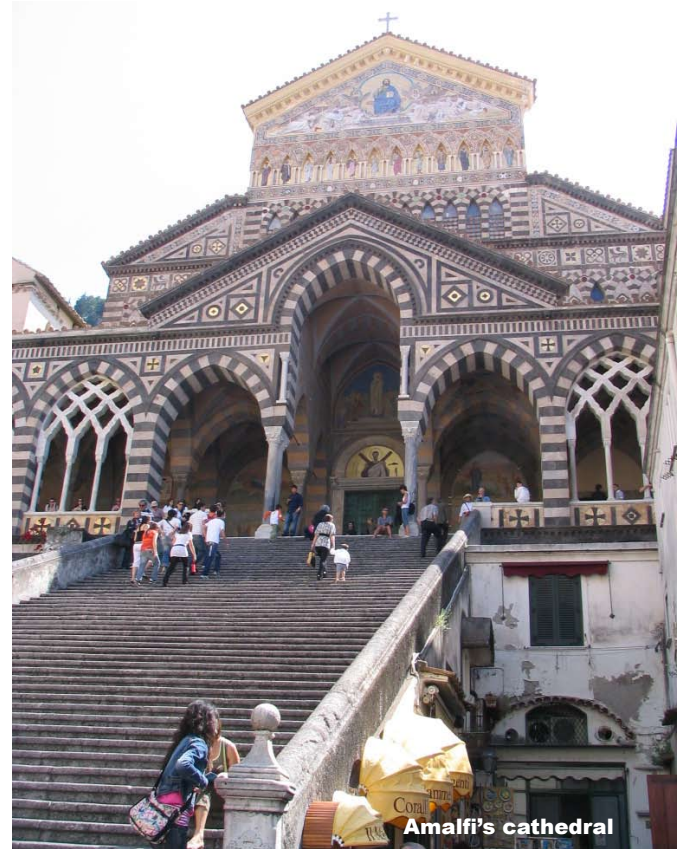
Europe. Independent from the seventh century until 1075, Amalfi reached the height of its power in about 1000 when it boasted a population of 70,000. Not only was the ship compass introduced to Europe in 1302 by Flavio Gioia, an Amalfi native, but Amalfi's maritime code was used in the Mediterranean until 1570.

Positano, a picturesque seaport of 3,900 lying 17 km (11 miles) west of Amalfi, was part of the maritime Republic of Amalfi in the tenth century. However, Positano's apogee came much later. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ships from Positano carried silk, spices and wood to the Middle East. The subsequent decline of Positano's prosperity coincided with the rise of steamships in the mid-nineteenth century. As much as three-quarters of the town's population of 8,000 immigrated to the United States, with the majority going to New York. Interestingly, one of the tough tasks that faced later mayors of Positano was finding

enough burial plots for those very emigrees, many of whom wanted to be buried back in their birthplace.

Positano, little more than a sleepy fishing village in the early twentieth century, was discovered after World War II when American troops, stationed in nearby Salerno, began taking holidays there. In the 1950s writers such as John Steinbeck and Tennessee Williams and painters such as Paul Klee were drawn to Positano. In the 1960s Mick Jagger and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones composed the lyrics to their song Midnight Rambler while on holiday in Positano. The rest, as they say, is history. Today tourism is the major industry, and the town is simply besieged by Europeans and North Americans during the summer. Positano is now among Europe's most chic destinations.

Sorrento, on the Gulf of Naples, is the gateway to the Amalfi Coast. With a population of 17,000, Sorrento lies at the western end of the Amalfi Drive. It can be reached easily by



Amalfi's cathedral

train, bus, ferry or hydrofoil from Naples, only 50 km (30 miles) away, or by ferry or hydrofoil from the Isle of Capri. Local coastal ferries operate along the Amalfi Coast between Sorrento

in the west and Salerno in the east. In summer there are also ferry and hydrofoil services between Amalfi, Positano and Capri and between Amalfi, Positano and Naples.



Amalfi Drive trestles

**ABOUT TED COOKSON:** Egypt's most widely-traveled travel agent, Ted has been to every country in the world! He has also visited 307 of the 317 destinations on the list of the Travelers' Century Club (visit [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) and refer to World Travel Club). A travel agent in Cairo since 1986, Ted manages EGYPT PANORAMA TOURS, a full-service travel agency, at 4 Road 79 (between Roads 9 and 10, near the "El Maadi" metro station) in Maadi. Contact Egypt Panorama Tours (open 7 days a week 9 AM-5 PM) at: Tels. 2359-0200, 2358-5880, 2359-1301. Fax 2359-1199. E-mail: [ept@link.net](mailto:ept@link.net). Web site: [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com). The password for residents is eptcool. Both text and PDF versions of all of Ted's travel articles published since 2002 are archived online at [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com) under "Ted's International Travel Articles." Some of the archived articles also contain video clips!