

## **Contemplating my Naples**

Joseph Glascott tasted life in Corricella, the centuries old fishing village on the bay of Naples on this unique art tour.

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We awake to the sounds of fishermen calling across the water and the chug of trawlers leaving the harbour. We throw open the shutters of our bedroom and look down on fishermen unfolding stacks of nets and spreading tackle while dozens of small craft – yachts, cruisers and dinghies – ebb at anchor behind the breakwater. It is early morning in the fishing village of Corricella on Procida Island in the Bay of Naples.

Soon the sun lights up the cliffs on the far side of the bay and the colours of Corricella – pastel pinks, lemons and blues – spring to life. The village is an amazing honeycomb of buildings crowded on top of one another on the slopes and above the bay.

Amid the jumble runs a network of narrow, cobbled streets and stone stairways. In the middle of this cluster is the apartment that was home to my wife and me for the 14 days of our ART INCONTRO tour to Procida and Naples.

The tours are organised by Australian-born Italian artist, Lucia Parrella. A woman of much warmth, laughter and organisational ability, Parrella conducts small groups (11 in our case) on concentrated studies of Italian history and culture, interspersed with drawing workshops.

Procida is an hour's ferry trip from Naples and is the smallest island in the bay. It attracts far fewer tourists than its larger neighbour, Ischia Island, and for this reason retains its Neapolitan lifestyle.

Our home is a small two-level apartment surrounded by a wide balcony with table setting and umbrella overlooking the bay. Every morning we climb the

short, cobbled street to Piazza dei Martiri, where patriots who supported the Neapolitan Republic in 1799 were hanged. Today it is a community space where old men gossip, children play ball games and women wait to join Mass in the domed church beside the square.

We are heading for the tiny bread shop where the signora behind the counter greets us with a smile and coaches us in ordering her freshly baked loaves and croissants in Italian (una pagnotta di pane).

The bayside promenade below our apartment has three restaurants serving fish and pasta. On some days, the fisherman and melon sellers hawk their produce in the square below our balcony.

It is only a 15 minute walk across the island from Corricella to the main shopping centre at the port Marina Grande. The route is one of narrow cobbled alleys that are shared with scooters, cars, noisy three-wheeled taxis and buses. You quickly learn to squeeze against the walls to get out of the way.

Our stay begins by visiting Procida's founding site on the huge cliffs of Terra Murata where in the walled compound lies the 11<sup>th</sup> century Abbey of San Michele Arcangelo, the island's patron saint. Inhabitants fled to the abbey to escape the assault of the Berbers. Terra Murata also contains the 16<sup>th</sup> century Castello D'Avolos, a residence of the Bourbon dynasty, as well as the looming walls of an early prison.

The abbey nave features beautiful majolica tiles and a silver sculpture of St Michael Archangel. The ceiling is decorated with the works of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Neapolitan painter, Luca Giordano.

Next, the drawing lesson – the first of eight – on Corricella bayside. Of course, drawing is not compulsory, and if you wish you may use your time painting, reading, taking photos or snoozing in the sun.

A 15 minute ferry ride takes us to the island of Ischia and the Castello Aragonese, with its enormous gold-leaved dome of the Angevin cathedral of Assunta and the Convento delle Clarisse.

Back on Procida, Parrella arranges for members of the local drama society, a charming young soprano and musicians to present for us a moving pageant and readings from the book, Arturo's Island, set on Procida by the author Elsa Morante. We follow the troupe through the alleyways and squares of the upper island as they perform.

Morante's name featured in another memorable event. Most of the cities of southern Italy have gardens and community arts centres named after literary figures. Procida has the Elsa Morante Literary Park, in an old lemon orchard on the heights overlooking the bay and Terra Murata. This was the site for a twilight concert; we watch the sun set to Puccini and Beethoven.

The port of Pozzuoli is only half an hour away by ferry and here we inspect the volcanic area known for centuries as the Campi Flegrei, or the burning fields.

Naples, too, is close and we visit the magnificent National Archaeological Museum, where one can spend days inspecting collections from Pompeii, Herculaneum and other Campanian cities as well as amazing rooms of statues and works of art.

On the feast day of San Gennaro, the patron saint of Naples, we attend the Duomo for the celebration of the miracle of the saint's blood. A statue of the saint is carried in procession from the cathedral. Neapolitan legend has it that congealed blood in the statue must turn to liquid to avoid catastrophe for the city and thousand turn out the mark the day.

After 14 days on Procida, we have another four days in Naples, in an atmospheric old hotel behind tall timber gates off via Constantinopoli near Piazza Bellini.

Here we stroll along the streets and byways of Napoli including the crowded jumble via Tribunali and its art reviewers' back room restaurant. We are taken on inspections of wonderful art galleries – including some that were hiding in columned courts behind street doors.

Our time spent absorbing the history of the region was uniquely Italian. We come away not only with our memories and our photographs, but also a book of our own sketches of the island.

For more information email [lucia@artincontro.com.au](mailto:lucia@artincontro.com.au) and request an ART INCONTRO NAPOLI itinerary.