

Yacht club

Yacht cruising is ideal for an intimate, island-hopping escape along Italy's Amalfi Coast, writes **Monica Meade**

Nice, but a little overrated. That was my verdict seven years ago, following my first visit to the Amalfi Coast. But this time, steadily approaching Positano on the cushioned front deck of the *Amalfi Dream* catamaran, it clicked. This was the view I'd seen on the postcards.

Steep, tree-topped mountains soared behind the colourful stacked-up buildings of this cliffside town, dropping straight down into the Mediterranean Sea. Just as Route 66 must be seen from the road, Italy's Divina Costiera deserves to be explored on the water.

OLD-WORLD PROCIDA

On the first morning of Dream Yacht Charter's eight-day cruise around the Bay of Naples aboard the six-cabin catamaran, I was woken by a gentle rocking as we pulled up at the island of Procida. The rising sun cast its dusty pink glow on the centuries-old, pastel-painted houses around a harbour formed by an extinct volcanic crater.

Sending small waves toward the coast of fishing village Marina Corricella as we tendered in, the only signs of life were the busy hands of a fisherman fixing his net and a waiter setting out chairs, keen to catch his first customers. Only small vessels can access the eastern side of the 1.6-square-mile island, so thanks

to our early wake-up, we'd beaten the crowds from larger ships arriving at the main port.

On the way down from the Civic Museums' rooftop terrace, the highest point on this rustic island, I looked around fortified 17th-century village Casale Vascello, and the medieval Terra Murata village. It felt incredibly peaceful, with a naturally slow pace even as visitors arrived to admire its viewpoints or grab a mid-morning coffee.

Back on board, I took the opportunity to cool off with a swim – there are plenty of opportunities to hop off for an impromptu dip or try snorkelling and stand-up paddleboarding with the equipment provided. Then I dried off just in time for lunch prepared by resident chef Aldo.

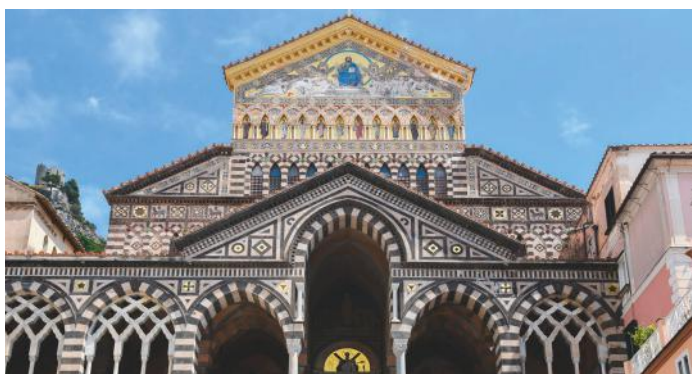
"I grew up in Rome and started cooking at home when I was just a boy," he said. "I owned a restaurant in the city before coming to work on the yachts." Like Aldo, the chefs and skippers on crewed charters are always local.

His cooking was hearty, wholesome and with a dash of Italian flair. Even with the option to dine ashore, we found we didn't want to. All three meals a day can be tailored to dietary requirements, with fresh fish each evening.

Sailing from Procida to Capri, we anchored for

DESTINATIONS

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Lazy days aboard the catamaran; sunset over Corricella and Terra Murata on the island of Procida; *Amalfi Dream*; Amalfi Cathedral

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To ensure the trade can confidently present this option, we collaborate closely with our travel agent partners. We are dedicated to providing them with the necessary tools and understanding to increase awareness."

Loic Bonnet, founder, Dream Yacht Charter



BOOK IT

Dream Yacht Charter offers a seven-night Dream Capri Premium Cruise from £1,144 per person, based on double occupancy of a private en suite cabin on a full-board basis, departing from Naples on May 1, 2027. Flights not included. dreamyachtcharter.com

a night on the rugged side of the island, surrounded by cliffs, grottos and sea stacks, while Aldo sang along to Te Amo and prepared squid ink pasta for our dinner.

PRETTY POSITANO

Having left the blinds open, I woke to the sunrise over the water and the smell of freshly baked walnut cake from Aldo's galley. At breakfast, Captain Marco gave us an update. "There are incoming winds so we could dock in a harbour tonight. It's up to you where," he said.

Despite the pre-planned itinerary, it's common for yachting routes to change with the weather. Captain Marco recommended a night in Amalfi, so we set off, pausing at Capri's beauty spots before swinging by Positano – known for its lemon groves, dazzling ceramics and ocean-view seafood restaurants. Rocking up there in what Captain Marco called our "floating villa", I felt like an A-lister – our yacht was easily the most impressive in the bay. While the deck and open-plan kitchen-diner were spacious and modern, cabins were compact and minimalist, with a double bed and a dinky en-suite shower room.

But for me, the true luxury came from feeling the closest I'll ever get to owning a huge, multimillion-pound yacht with a private chef and a captain. There's a unique sense of peace and connection to the sea compared with a bigger vessel, since the *Amalfi Dream* has capacity for only 12 guests, and the fact clients can rent on a per-cabin basis means they can enjoy the yachting experience without breaking the bank.

This half-crewed trip offered plenty of freedom to do as I pleased, but clients looking for extra flexibility can

consider fully crewed charters that allow them to hire an entire yacht and set their own itinerary, or an independent charter for fully qualified sailors to go it alone.

AUTHENTIC AMALFI

"Pastries!" one of my fellow guests announced as she returned with Aldo from Pasticceria Pansa, one of the region's oldest confectionery producers, founded in 1830. Opening the giant white parcel, she revealed *cornetti* – the Italian relative of croissants – in lemon, chocolate, pistachio and traditional custard, sugar-dusted varieties. After our bougie breakfast treats, I left the dock for a wander around town alone while the other guests kicked back on the foredeck.

As the other towns on the Amalfi Coast are so delicately elegant, arriving at Piazza Duomo, I was taken aback by the grand, black-and-white striped Cathedral of Saint Andrew. Perched on top, shining in the Mediterranean sun, was a round bell tower with yellow and green Moorish arches, hand-painted multi-coloured tiles and Romanesque columns. After exploring the cathedral and its complex I followed its hidden alleyways past historic paper-making shops and indulgent gelaterias.

Only by stopping off at six towns along Italy's Campania Coast, able to compare them day by day, could I appreciate the distinct charm and character of each. So although I felt like a fish out of water being back on dry land again, I left the Amalfi Coast Unesco World Heritage Site with dreams of returning for another island-hopping trip – to see more of what only small vessels like the *Amalfi Dream* can reach. **TW**