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Marina di Praia
along the Amalfi
Coast. Photo by EB
Adventure

PRAIANO

The Amalfi Coast's best-kept secret is this charming little town tucked between Amalfi and Positano in the province of Salerno.

By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli

NATIVE SOIL

From my terrace in Praiano, a pastel-blue sky fuses with blushing pink and an auric sun sets in the distance over Capri.

Welcome to the ancient village of Praiano, a dreamy place blessed with natural beauty. Majestic mountains peek out from the sea, and Saracen watchtowers, named Torre a Mare and Torre di Grado, guard the coast — while gifts from the Gods, like sun-ripened tomatoes, fresh fish and sfusato lemons, are everywhere.

Praiano was once called Pelagianum, a Latin term meaning open sea. The Roman Emperors flocked to this jagged coastal town, making it their summer resort. Today, the village is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Praiano is known for its white-washed houses facing the sea, and the church of San Gennaro built in 1300 and rebuilt in 1589. The church's piazza is the center of life for locals, humble people with warm hearts who are always open to share their stories. Praiano may be less traveled, but it's the Amalfi Coast's best kept secret.

Besides the history, architecture and

people, there are other things that make it special. For example, Signor Mario at Il Gusto della Costa is always a delight, and his limoncello and liqueurs are respected worldwide.

Today we stop by Kasai, a lively trattoria owned by Signor Luca and Costabile. Eleven years ago the pair opened their doors to serve traditional family recipes. Today, Executive Chef Catello Celentano heads the kitchen with a menu that respects the past with new creative interpretations.

"Since I was a child, my life has been shaped by the wonderful rural world of living on a farm — raising farmyard animals, growing everything I could, and watching my mother and grandmother transform ingredients into foods bursting with flavor and aroma," says Chef Catello.

Celebrations were special. "Days before the holidays, my house would be bustling with aunts and relatives, all busy preparing Eggplant Parmigiana and lasagna, and setting up the garden with tables and chairs," he says.

Catello attended hotel management school, and, at 16, worked during the

summer at a hotel near his home. After completing school, he moved to Bergamo and Milan where he worked at the Four Seasons and gained experience in the hospitality and luxury hotel industry.

"Then, a call from my homeland brought me back to Campania where I was offered a position at Quattro Passi, a Michelin-star restaurant in Nerano. Experiences in Spain, Russia, Germany and Switzerland followed," he says. He began working at Kasai eight years ago.

"I wanted to work in a restaurant and hospitality sector that reflected my childhood — direct, sincere, and without filters," he says. At Kasai, the signature dish is Spaghetti e Totani, made with red squid caught by the fishermen of Praiano.

"The name Kasai translates to 'fire,' and I will always keep the flame of good food and wholesome hospitality alive that's always distinguished our region," he says.

Chef Catello invites us to lunch, but we continue along the via to the next stop, a local delicatessen and grocery shop called La Moressa 1952.

This shop showcases local wine, mozzarella, Prosciutto, artisan bread, fruits,

Praiano's white structures stand out against the Amalfi coastline.
Photo by DroneVideos





vegetables and prepared food. There's also an espresso/cappuccino bar and terrace if you want to sit down and soak up the view. Owned by Vittorio and his sons Luca and Aldo, this store is a food emporium for every food lover. The family also owns La Moressa Restaurant and La Posteria Restaurant. A signature dish is Totani e Patate, fried red squid and potatoes. I ask him about it.

"Totani e Patate is an ancient fishermen's recipe from Praiano made without tomatoes because tomatoes arrived in Italy around 1530," Luca says. "The squid is fried in oil and then the potatoes are fried in the same oil, allowing the potatoes to absorb the flavor of the squid. Adding potatoes made portions go further when fishermen's catches were sparse," he adds.

"We've been accepted into the Gagnano Pasta Consortium and have our own brand of La Moressa 1952 I.G.P. bronze-cut pasta, meaning Protected Geographic Indication," he adds.

He gifts me a bag of paccheri pasta and a slice of castagnaccio, a traditional Christmas cake made with chestnut flour. We enjoy espressos on the terrace.

Next, we walk to Miragalli Caffè on the main road where Signor Mario, the owner, is waiting.

Mario's shop and garden caffè is brimming with Vietri ceramic plates and table linens. He's preparing a tagliere with local cheese, Prosciutto and salumi, calling it a tribute to Praiano's pastures and artisan producers who continue to tell their story of this land.

"As a child, I've spent my time among vineyards, vegetable gardens and mountain trails. This is where my passion for wine, cured meats and rural tradition developed. I owe this to my grandfather Giovanni, Alfonso, my father and uncle Gaetano who instilled the value of tradition, sacrifice, and a love for authenticity," he says.

"Every year, I waited for the grape harvest, early morning wake-ups, work in the vineyards, the joy of being together, and the festive atmosphere that accompanied those memories I hold dear. I can still smell the freshly picked grapes on my hands and that feeling of happiness that only simple things can give," he says.

The holidays were a big part of his memories.

"I cherish the memory of the days leading up to Christmas when the family gathered for one of our lands' oldest traditions of pork processing. From those moments came the cured meats that would accompany the table throughout the year. It was a ritual of sacrifice, respect and sharing, and those memories shaped who I am. My dream has never stopped accompanying me — guiding my choices and fueling my determination," he says.

"At 18 I worked in high-end hotels learning from professionals while acquiring valuable skills. It's been a journey of sacrifice, personal growth and passion. Then in June 2024, my dream became a reality thanks to my lifelong companion, Angela. She designed this space and we opened Miragalli, meaning 'to look at the Galli,' the archipelago between Capri and Positano."

Mario brings tears to my eyes as he tells his story and serves Praiano Fizz cocktails to everyone.

I thank Mario for his time and hospitality, and continue to one last stop at the LaB: La Barbera Laboratorio del Gelato, a beloved gelato and coffee bar, owned by Signor Roberto.

Formerly a dentist, Roberto wanted a gelateria in his hometown, and so he opened the Lab, an ice cream shop offering generous scoops of artisan chocolate, pistachio, vanilla and Stracciatella gelato. Although Roberto is shy, he poses for a photo with a cone and scoop in hand. A day in Italy is not complete without a gelato — even at Christmas.

To my Praianese friends, *grazie mille*. You are the new generation of trailblazers carrying Praiano into the next era. I call these entrepreneurs modern-day Roman Equites in this village I call home.

Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli is founder and owner of Cooking Vacations Italy which specializes in culinary tours, hands-on cooking classes and cultural adventures in Italy. www.cooking-vacations.com; (617) 247-4112.

Top: Signor Mario at Il Gusto della Costa
Center: Signor Mario of Miragalli Caffè
Bottom: Signor Roberto of Le Barbera Laboratorio del Gelato
 Photos by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli