



Nonna Pina Agriturismo

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Alba Christmas lights

DREAM OF [®] ITALY

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IRPINIA: Ancient Meets Modern in Southern Italy

It is ironic how little known *Irpinia* is, given how many Italian-Americans have their roots here in the mountainous sub-region just east of Naples (if it sounds familiar it may be because the fictional Tony Soprano's family hailed from *Avellino*) and the fact that the area is less than an hour from the exceedingly popular Amalfi Coast. Anyone with family from the province of Avellino hails from Irpinia, which Italians call the green heart of *Campania*. Serious wine lovers know Irpinia by prestigious labels like *Feudi di San Gregorio* and *Mastrobernardino*.



understand that quality does not necessarily correlate with top 10 lists and obsequious service. This is a land for curious travelers and serious Italophiles who want to see how ancient and contemporary Italy can be beautifully integrated. Irpinia is what Tuscany was decades ago — a place you could sit with a medieval *fresco* in a small church all by yourself, or wander around an ancient hill town for the afternoon and find yourself invited to a local's home for dinner that evening.

Land of Contradictions

Avellino, the capital city of Irpinia is

continued on page 4

Right now, Irpinia is the ideal destination for those travelers who

The city of *Avellino* has 55,000 residents.

The holiday season is a magical time of year in Italy and a great time to experience Italian traditions new and old. Over the years at *Dream of Italy*, we've written about various ways to celebrate Christmas, New Year's and the Epiphany throughout Italy. To come up with some new and different ideas, we asked some of our favorite Italophiles for their fellow holiday experiences in Italy.



Northern Italy



Manarola

Cinque Terre: World's Largest Presepe

The biggest *presepe* (nativity scene) in the world is in *Manarola* in the *Cinque Terre*, and was designed and built by *Mario Andreoli*, a retired railway

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Holiday Season *continued from page 1*

worker. The presepe consists of 300 full-scale illuminated figures covering a hillside. It has been environmentally friendly since 2008, when a photovoltaic factory was built especially to supply electricity to it. To appreciate the nativity at its best, walk up toward the *Church of San Lorenzo*, which was built in the Gothic and Baroque style during the 14th century. In 2016, the presepe opens with a lighting ceremony on December 8 at 5:30 p.m. and will remain open through the end of January.

*Recommended by Pietro Guerrera,
Eattiamo, www.eattiamo.com*

Dolomites: Christmas Village of Ortisei

Head to the village of *Ortisei*, in the valley of *Val Gardena*, for Christmas magic in the Dolomite mountains. Listen to Christmas carols, be guided to the doors of bakeries and stalls by the sweet smell of Christmas cookies



Ortisei market

wandering through the village, kneel and touch the carved wooden nativity scene figures, gaze in wonder at the advent decorations and the snow-covered landscape, and close your eyes when you sit back at the end of the day and enjoy a steaming mug of mulled wine. In the Christmas market, fairytale-like huts entice guests to taste regional products and scrumptious dishes. You'll be spoilt for choice, with a wide range of original gifts, delicious biscuits and cakes, luxurious wines

and grappas. Market is open December 12 to January 8. For more information, visit www.nadelurtjiei.com

*Recommended by Klaus Kier, General Manager of the Adler Dolomiti,
www.adler-dolomiti.com*



Le Marche: Urbania Celebrates La Befana

As the cold air fills with festive music and the smell of roasted chestnuts and spiced wine, *Befanas* of all ages descend upon the cobblestone streets to celebrate in *Urbania*, the town in Le Marche that La Befana is believed to hail from. In Italian folklore, La Befana is an old woman who delivers gifts to children throughout Italy on the Eve of Epiphany. In addition to delivering gifts, she will sweep the floor before she leaves! It is customary to set out a glass of wine and snacks to thank her for cleaning the house. *Festa Nazionale della Befana* runs January 2 to 6. For more information, visit www.urbania-casteldurante.com

*Recommended by Ashley Bartner, La Tavola Marche,
www.latavolamarche.com*



Venice: Rowing and Vin Brûlé

There is nothing more Venetian than the voga, the rowing style made famous by the gondoliers, and Row Venice offers the chance to try it yourself. To further raise your spirits



Night row in Venice

during this holiday season, book the *Vogata di Sera* evening row in *Canal Grande* and enjoy another local holiday tradition: steaming hot *vin brûlé*! No holiday gathering in Venice, especially an outdoor one, is complete without *vin brûlé*. The 90-minute evening row lesson (180€ for one to four people) is offered daily at 5:30 p.m. from December 8 to January 6. For more information, visit www.rowvenice.org

Recommended by Nan McElroy

Central Italy Florence: Arrival of the Magi

Celebrate the Epiphany in Florence by watching the arrival of the *Magi* (Wise Men) in period costumes with their cavalcade of more than 500 participants — also in costume as knights, drummers, and flag bearers — in *Piazza Duomo*. It is a very special performance cherished by locals and lucky travelers, and is a perfect glimpse into the local way of enjoying the holidays. The magi come bearing the traditional gifts, of course, and present them to a living nativity scene with farm animals and people dressed as Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The parade starts at 2:15 p.m. on January 6 in *Palazzo Pitti* and makes its way across the *Ponte Vecchio* and to *Piazza della Signoria* before ending in *Piazza Duomo*.

*Recommended by Kenny Dunn, Eating Italy Food Tours,
www.eatingitalyfoodtours.com*



Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore

Rome: Christmas Concert and Capuchin Crypts

In an evening that combines Christmas atmosphere, Baroque Italian music, and history, music lovers can enjoy a classical Christmas concert in the Church of *Santa Maria Immacolata*, followed by a guided tour (in English) of the Capuchin crypts. The crypts, a



Capuchin crypts

grotesque exhibit, contain the bones of 3,700 Capuchin friars whose remains were transported to the crypt when the monks arrived at the church in 1631. There are two concerts in 2016, held on December 23 and 30, and both will be performed by the *Schola Romana Ensemble*, which specializes in Roman music from the Baroque period. Music from composers *Giacomo Carissimi*, *Agostino Agazzari*, *Giuseppe Pitoni* and *Carlo Graziani* will be featured. For more information, visit www.classictic.com

Recommended by Lorna Davidson, The Roman Guy, www.theromanguy.com

Tuscany: Panforte Throwing

For an unusual tradition, experience *panforte* throwing in the Tuscan town of *Pienza*. Italians are used to gorging on this delicious Italian fruitcake over the Christmas holidays, but throwing it full pelt is unique to *Pienza*. The *Torneo Gioco del Panforte* is held from

December 26 to 30 in *Pienza*'s town hall and requires competitors to throw an entire panforte over a long table, attempting to slide it to the end (or as close as possible to it). The most points are awarded to those who can make



Panforte

their panforte hang over the edge. No points are awarded to those who make the panforte fall off! In 2016, more than 30 teams will take part, both locals and tourists alike. For more information, visit www.comune.pienza.siena.it



Daisy Cropper, *Insight Guides*,
www.insightguides.com

Umbria: Christmas Onion Festival

Cannara, a lovely little town 20 minutes from *Assisi*, is known for its onions (there's a huge festival in September) and so the town welcomes the Christmas season with a four-day mini-onion festival. Taverns are set up to enjoy traditional onion-based specialties with locals and there's a small Christmas market. Residents of *Cannara* also take pride in showing off their presepi as well as indulging in hot roasted chestnuts and vin brûlé.



Onions

In 2016, the *Festa della Cipolla Winter* takes place December 8 to 11. For more information, visit www.festadellacipolla.com

*Recommended by Jennifer McIlvaine, Life Italian Style Tours,
www.lifeitalianstyle.com*



Southern Italy Basilicata: Italy's Best Panettone

That most revered of Italian Christmas sweets, *panettone*, may have its origins in Milan, but it's a Basilicata baker who has taken the title for the country's best *continued on page 8*

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nothing like busy, chaotic Naples, less than an hour drive away. When I recently arrived in Avellino after spending nine days in Naples, I find myself inexplicably exhausted.

"It's because it's blissfully quiet," my husband explains with a relaxed smile. I sleep as soundly that night as when I visited the Highlands of Scotland.

A light mist veils the green mountaintops. Serpentine roads open up onto spectacular panoramic views where you can see rain clouds heavy over one town and the sun shining down on the next. Cozy villages nestle into the soft corners in between hilltops which are often fortified with crumbling medieval towers. Sometimes smoke appears funneling from the earth because of the intense geothermal activity in Irpinia that the Romans believed were portals to the underworld.

The prettiness is sometimes interrupted by a dour factory or industrial town, but then this is also the joy of Irpinia — it's a real and vital place, not a living museum like Venice or Siena that must restrict its expression of contemporary life in servitude to the tourism industry.

The mountains keep summers in Irpinia cool, getting up to around 80 degrees Fahrenheit and even though it isn't far from the sunny Amalfi Coast, the 200 plus days of rain annually make it feel more like Portland than *Positano*. There's even a ski resort in the town of *Laceno*. At the top of the chairlift, you can see the Tyrrhenian Sea sparkling on the other side the Appenines.

Irpinea is an especially ancient territory whose name derives from the Oscan word *hirpus*, which means wolf. Oscan

tribes, known as *Hirpini* because of their wolf totem, migrated here from Umbria in the 3rd century BC and settled among the Samnites. The Roman poet *Virgil* loved Irpinia and legends describe him foraging herbs on *Monte Partenio* for healing remedies.

Montevergine

Catholicism remains a strong cultural influence, especially in the isolated mountain villages, but ancient stories have been woven into its very fabric.

Local legend says that Saint William (*Gugliemo*) set off to build the *Sanctuary at Montevergine*, at the summit of *Monte Partenio*, but a wolf emerged from the woods and killed his donkey. Saint William then enlisted the wolf's help who stayed by him and hauled stones for his greatest work.

Montevergine may be the best place in Irpinia to discover the unexpected. An important point of pilgrimage since the 12th century, it is a long and difficult climb, so arduous in fact that during World War II, the Shroud of Turin was brought there to hide it from the Nazis.

The sanctuary was built over an ancient temple to *Cybele*, an earth goddess who was attended by devotees who would castrate themselves, literally sacrificing their gender for dutiful worship. In the Middle Ages, Cybele's worship was absorbed by an icon known as *Madonna Schiavona* or serving mother, who is also one of Italy's famous black Madonna's whose dark skin is symbolic of the earth. The ancient foundations of Montevergine have attracted transgender people who

dedicate a pilgrimage every February 2nd to the icon they call the "Madonna of Transformation."

LGBT pilgrims come to Montevergine to sing and pray before the icon as well as do the ancient *tammurriata* dance in the main *piazza*, celebrating long into the night. They especially recall the legend that in 1256, the Madonna interceded when two men on pilgrimage to Montevergine were attacked by an angry mob for displaying their affection for each other. They were stripped bare, put in chains and left to die of exposure in the cold snow. The Madonna seeing the mens' love for each other interceded, broke their chains and held them up as an example of



Montevergine in winter

love.

The climb to Montevergine is steep, but there is a funicular from *Viale San Modestino* in the village of Mercogliano; it costs 3€ round-trip. The schedule changes every month and can be confirmed on the website. (*Montevergine; located in Mercogliano; www.santuariodimontevergine.com; open daily in summer, on weekends rest of the year.*)

Ancient Vineyards Reborn

What's most striking about Irpinia is how well it blends the ancient and modern worlds, a direct result of the devastating earthquake of 1980. Many villages in the outskirts of Avellino were completely destroyed. Nearly 2,500 people were killed and 250,000 were left homeless. Rebuilding has been a slow process, which also gave rise to the *Camorra*, who siphoned off funds from the Italian government that

Montevergine is also known

were dedicated to rebuilding.

But the rebuilding also opened the door to new opportunities, most notably *Feudi Di San Gregorio*, one of Italy's best and most prestigious wineries. It was established in 1986 specifically to contribute to the redevelopment of the region and now the largest wine producer in southern Italy.

Italian designer *Massimo Vignelli* created the brand's signature labels to express Feudi's marriage of innovation and tradition. *Hikaru Mori* designed the state-of-the-art facility that opened in 2004. Travertine pavement lines an herb garden laid out on a grid pattern, every step an illustration of old and new Italy. Visitors are greeted in a library also designed by Vignelli.

Next to barrels of *Aglianico* in an aggressively sleek and modern *cantina*, the owners have installed a *presepio* made to look like the nearby Goleto Abbey, a medieval structure destroyed by the earthquake, but which has also been lovingly rebuilt over three decades. (*Feudi di San Gregorio*; located in Sorbo Serpico; 39-0825-986683; www.feudi.it; reserve in advance for tour)

The wine cellar at *Caggiano* in Taurasi looks ancient compared to Feudi, but it was also rebuilt after the earthquake. *Antonio Caggiano*, who in addition to being a winemaker, is an artist and photographer who hates to see anything go to waste. He builds beautiful chairs out of old wine barrels

and rebuilt the entire cellar from ancient stones that had been displaced by the earthquake.

Caggiano mostly leaves the winemaking now to his sons who have made their *Macchia dei Goti* (Stain of the Goths) one of Italy's most prestigious wines. Caggiano has won several important wine awards



Antonio Caggiano



Cantine Caggiano

including
the
Bibenda



Feudi di San Gregorio



Salvatore Molettierri and family

and Tre Bicchieri that larger producers only dream about. (*Cantine Antonio Caggiano*; located in Taurasi; 39-0827-74723; www.cantinecaggiano.it; reserve in advance for tour.)

Irpinia is one of the best, and at once undervalued, wine regions in the world, as well as one of the most ancient. The influence of Greece is evident in the varietal names, like Aglianico from *Hellenikos*, meaning simply Hellenic or Greek *Greco di Tufo* and *Coda di Volpe*, meaning "tail of the wolf" in reference to the way the vines on this particularly grape curl, also grow here.

Bouts of intense sunshine combined

with cool evenings create ideal conditions for growing and producing wines of quality, complexity, balance, terroir and longevity. Proximity to the Tyrrhenian Sea and extremely active volcanic and seismic activity infuses the vines with key minerals. Irpinia produces four different DOCG varietals: *Taurasi Aglianico*, *Greco di Tufo*, *Falanghina* and *Fiano Di Avellino*. *Aglianico* from Taurasi has long been referred to as the "*Barolo* of the south" due to its tannic structure, depth, and aging potential, which can rival *Nebbiolo*.

The Winemaker

One of the star winemakers of Irpinia is *Salvatore Molettieri*, whose winery is in his ancestral home of *Montemarano*. Many of the Molettieri family emigrated to New York (including my great-grandmother), though many also returned. Familial pride and a fierce passion for their territory is central to every wine in the Molettieri line, a darling of Robert Parker and his scoring system and of Eric Asimov in *The New York Times*. My sommelier husband says that Salvatore is one of his heroes.

On our second visit, his entire family is there on the terrace to greet us, even though it is a Sunday evening and the October crush is swiftly approaching. As we sit in his tasting room together, *Giovanni Molettieri*, an enologist and Salvatore's son, pours wine while his own 5-year-old daughter *Angela* follows closely behind, playing peekaboo with the guests.

Each wine, a bold expression of the land, tells a different story. Salvatore
continued on page 6

as *Partenio* or *Monti di Avella*.

sits with us and explains how he considers himself the father of the wine, partner to Mother Nature. The bees are his workers and when the environment is healthy, the children will also be a healthy expression of the land, something he emphasizes above all else. (39-0827-63722; www.salvatoremolettieri.com; contact in advance for visit)

Food in Irpinia

Irpinian food is forest food. Cured pork is made especially delicious by the abundance of acorns. Caciomano cheese made from sheep's milk is a signature. Chestnuts that grow here are among the best in the world, as are the black truffles from *Bagnoli Irpino*.

The high quality of the local ingredients combined with a reverence for simplicity make Irpinia a tremendous place to eat well without feeling bloated and heavy. At *Marennà*, the Michelin-starred restaurant at Feudi di San Gregorio, local ingredients are expressed through fine dining preparations and nothing is ever served out of season. I swooned over a plate of baby zucchini *scapece* over sheep's milk ricotta-stuffed *raviolini* and a hunk of veal braised in Aglianico.

The name Marennà comes from the verb *merere* "to deserve" in keeping with the mission of the kitchen to provide a worthy reward for a hard-earned hunger. The dining room is a jewel box of Massimo Vignelli's peerless design sense and service is executed with attention to every detail. Guests are

invited to watch the chefs at work in the open kitchen.

While this meal of a lifetime should be the standout of my travels in Irpinia, the one I may never forget takes place at *Nonna Pina Country House*, a guest house in Bagnoli Irpino. A sweet dog who they found years ago abandoned on a road, an old cranky cat and a pair of friendly kittens are to greet us as we arrive via a long gravel driveway. Behind the house are breathtaking views of the mountains, a medieval abbey and tower and more farmland where a baby goat runs around among chickens and ducks beneath fig trees.

Lunch begins with a plate of cheese and cured meats, so simple yet each with flavors that were so pure that it was like tasting mozzarella for the first time. The main course is handmade ravioli stuffed with freshly made *ricotta* and local *caciocavallo* cheese and

smothered in Bagnoli black truffles. While we feast, the proprietor runs out to his fields to pick fresh figs for our fruit course. A sponge cake made from their own amarenco cherries is truly the single most delicious dessert I have had or could ever imagine eating in this

lifetime.

But what makes the experience so searing was the tremendous pride our hosts had in their olive oil, their cheese and fruit, how they had grown it,



Ravioli at Marennà



Figs at Nonna Pina

shaped it, how it tells a story about Irpinia and how much they loved their land and history.

Castles and Abbeys

Irpinia has more than 60 medieval castles, many of which look like fairy tale illustrations, like the *Castello Lancellotti* (Lancelot) in *Lauro*.

Lombards and Longboards were here as well as the Normans, Angevins and Aragonese. Some castles still stand alongside a fortified village while others are in ruin adjacent to a modern town or along a roadside.

But the most impressive and the most romantic ruin is that of *Goleto Abbey*. About 40 minutes from Avellino, after passing by a characteristic mix of beautiful mountains as well as industrial towns and factories, the abbey rises up in a remote, grassy field. Surrounded by feral olive trees and wildflowers, the entire basilica is now exposed. Lizards scamper over sculptures of wild beasts that once served to scare away demons and evil spirits. The abbey was almost completely destroyed during the earthquake, but it has been slowly and lovingly rebuilt over the past 30 years.

Established by Saint William in 1114 before he built Montevergne, it was originally a convent for nuns with a small, separate cloister for monks. During what is called the "Age of the Nuns," the abbey became very wealthy with gifts and support from the local aristocracy. On the second floor is a chapel where frescoed portraits of the Abbesses with their shepherd's staffs have been reaffixed to the walls.

After the plague caused the convent to decline, the "Epoch of the Monks" began when the last abbess passed away in 1515. In 1807, Joseph

Another famous cheese from



Goleto Abbey

Bonaparte, the king of Naples and brother-in-law of Napoleon, ordered the monastery closed and the body of Saint William, which was buried at Goleto, was moved to Montevergine. His original tomb is still at Goleto, set quietly against a wall.

Goleto Abbey was completely abandoned between 1807 and 1973 when a monk from Montevergine

received permission to reconsecrate the site. Since 1989 it has been under the care of a religious order who continue to conduct research and restoration and hold religious services there. The sacred architecture broken but now open to the sky, makes the ruin feel tremendously peaceful and like a temple to the ever-changing sun, wind and rain in the fierce but gentle landscape. (*Goleto Abbey; locaed in Sant'*

Angelo dei Lombardi; 39-0827-24432; www.goleto.it)

—Danielle Oteri

A writer and art historian, Danielle Oteri leads private museum tours in New York, an Elena Ferrante-inspired tour of Naples and food and wine tours in Campania. Her stories about Naples and Irpinia have appeared in *Conde Nast Traveler* and Anthony Bourdain's online magazine *Roads & Kingdoms*. For more information, visit www.feastonhistory.com

Getting Around

A car is absolutely essential to explore Irpinia on your own but if you would like someone else to do some of the driving and guiding or explore this area on a day trip from the Amalfi Coast, hire **Gaetano Petrillo** from *The Wine Bus*. He's one of our favorite guides in all of Italy, is a native of the town of **Montemillito** and specializes in wine and genealogy.

The Wine Bus

(39) 388 7001516
www.thewinebus.it

Where to Stay

Albergo Diffuso

Borgo di Castelvetere
Via Castello, 1
Castelvetere Sul Calore
www.borgodicastelvetere.it
(39) 0827 65300

Rates: 80 to 220€ per night.

If you want to experience a medieval village you can stay in **Castelvetere sul Calore** where there is a *borgo diffuso*, a growing hotel trend in Italy. Essentially it's a town where former houses are now hotel rooms, letting guests have the experience of living in an ancient Italian village. (It is also the ancestral hometown of *Dream of Italy* editor Kathy McCabe whose maternal *Nargi* family hail from here.) Castelvetere provides an unspoiled medieval setting paired with excellent hospitality and a fantastic restaurant that serves only local dishes.

Hotel de La Ville

Via Giovanni Palatucci, 20
Avellino
(39) 0825 780911
www.hoteldelavilleavellino.it
Rates: Rooms range from 69€ for a single to 230€ double per night.
Rooms are clean, quiet and comfortable and the restaurant is excellent

at this centrally located hotel.

There's a gym and a swimming pool, but best of all the staff, all dressed in tuxedos, are attentive and kind.

Nonna Pina Agriturismo

Contrada S. Donato
Bagnoli Irpino
(39) 082 762341
www.countryhousenonnapina.com
Rates: 65 to 85€ per night, depending on the season, and includes all meals.

Il Vecchio Mulino 1834

Strada Provinciale Ponteromito-Castelfranci
Castelfranci
(39) 331 2070586
www.ilvecchiomulinoristorante.it
Open Tuesdays through Sunday for lunch and dinner.

Built into an old grain mill on the *Calore* river, **Il Vecchio Mulino** is a fine dining restaurant that elevates Irpinian classic recipes. All ingredients are organic and the menu changes with the seasons. Il Vecchio Mulino's notoriety is about to soar as it will appear in the prestigious *Gambero Rosso* restaurant guide for 2017.

Where to Eat

Marenna

Feudi di San Gregorio
Loc. Cerza Grossa
Sorbo Serpico
(39) 0825 986666
www.feudi.it/marella
Open daily except Tuesday for lunch and dinner.
A 5-course tasting menu starts at 52€ per person.

1€ = \$1.06 at press time

Irpinia is Pecorino Bagnoles.

Holiday Season *continued from page 3*

panettone for a few years running. The accolades for his tasty treat have brought tourists to town to taste Italy's most famous Christmas *dolce* directly from the king himself, and you can too. Visit the *Pasticceria Tiri 1957* in *Acerenza* to taste it for yourself, and meet the 33-year-old *principe* in his pastry domain. *Vincenzo Tiri* bakes about 500 of the bread-like fruitcakes every day, rising in the middle of the night and working through the day to produce the cakes from quality ingredients. The baker's secret recipe includes homemade candied fruit, sweet butter, raisins and Basilicata honey. For more information, visit www.facebook.com/Tiri1957

*Recommended by Valerie Schneider,
My Bella Basilicata,
www.mybellabasilicata.com*

Basilicata: **Borgo Castellabate Christmas Market**

Tucked inside the medieval streets of a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Christmas market at *Castellabate* on the *Cilento* coast feels like walking around a living *presepe*. Food vendors, craftspeople and Christmas lights line the winding streets and lanes of one of Italy's most beautiful historic towns. Market stalls sell all of the typical Italian Christmas sweets as well as crafts such as ceramics, embroidery, paintings, and jewelry, and local schools set up stalls with children selling crafts and gifts that they have made during the school year. Runs December 7 to 11 in 2016.

Recommended by Danielle Oteri, Feast on History Tours, www.feastonhistory.com



Luci d'Artista

Campania: **Sorrento Celebrations**

The historic center of Sorrento twinkles during the holidays. Beginning November 26 with the lighting of a huge tree in *Piazza Tasso*, celebrations continue with street performances on weekends; jazz, gospel, and classical music concerts in the churches; a Christmas treasure hunt; and a *Villaggio di Babbo Natale* (Santa's Village for the *bambini*) at *Villa Fiorentino*. In addition to the usual Italian Christmas treats, you can also sample Neapolitan fried pizza, a popular local street food. After Christmas, stay in town for a big New Year's Eve party with a DJ in *Piazza Tasso*, followed by fireworks at the port to ring in the new year. For more information, visit www.eventssorrento.com

*Recommended by Susan Van Allen, author
of 100 Places in Italy Every Woman
Should Go, www.susanvanallen.com*

Campania: **Luci d'Artista in Salerno**

The city of *Salerno* shines even brighter during *Luci d'Artista*, an exhibition of artistic light installations all over the city. The streets, squares and piazzas become a magical wonderland with cascading lights and intricate lighting displays. Take the little ones to the Enchanted Garden in the *Villa Comunale* to see light displays depicting characters and scenes

from treasured fairy tales. New this year is a ferris wheel in Sottopiazza della Concordia, nativities sculpted from sand at the Maritime Station of Salerno, and a 5€ tourist card that gives

access to plenty of discounts. Salerno also has several Christmas markets opening on December 6. *Luci d'Artista* runs through January 22, 2017. For more information, visit www.livesalerno.com

Recommended by Cherrye Moore, My Bella Vita, www.mybellavita.com



Sicily: **Customaci Live Nativity**

The 35th edition of this living nativity, *Presepe Vivente di Customaci* is held in Customaci, near *Trapani*, bringing together craftsmen and artists from all over Sicily for six days between Christmas and Epiphany. The living nativity is recreated annually within the Mangiapane Cave; leaning against



Customaci Live Nativity

the cave are tiny houses built by shepherds and farmers. The special feature of this nativity is the display of ancient trades and Sicilian scenes. The actors are not actors but real craftsmen who still own and carry out their professions in and around Customaci. So you will find a cobbler repairing the shoes, the barber cutting hair, women spinning wool, etc. In 2016/2017, the event will be held December 25 and 26 and January 5 to 8. For more information, visit www.presepeviventedicustomaci.it

*Recommended by Margherita Bilenchi,
Bravo Holidays, www.bravovillas.com*

We didn't have enough room for all of the great Christmas in Italy travel suggestions so visit www.dreamofitaly.com/christmas-in-italy for more!

Christmas Eve is known as *La Vigilia*.