

Bareboat Charter in Italy by Gary Harris

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Castellammare di Stabia- We arrived at Naples terminal from Florence at 11:00. We had previously arranged a van and driver through Pompeii Car Service to meet us at the terminal and Mario was waiting with his 8 person Mercedes Van. We mentioned that we'd like to have lunch nearby then visit Mt Vesuvius. As we were in Naples, he suggested a Pizza place in town which, if we are lucky, would not yet have a line. We were pleasantly surprised to find no line at L'antica Pizzeria da Michele which is an unassuming place on a small side street that one would never know has the best pizza in Naples (and thereby Italy, and therefore in the world). Here there are exactly 3 items on the menu; Margherita, Margherita with extra cheese, and Marinara. We sat at the basic formica tables on simple chairs and ordered 5 pizzas and two bottles of still water for the seven of us which arrived in about 7 minutes. There was a signed photo on the wall above our table of Julia Roberts, who apparently added notoriety (especially for American tourists) by eating at this restaurant in "Eat, Pray, Love" (spectacularly awful movie). The pizza was fantastic which we ravenously devoured in 15 minutes. At this point the restaurant had filled with locals and tourists and a line had formed outside. Mario was waiting outside as routed through Naples, noting interesting items and facts about the city on our way to Vesuvius. He dropped us at the end of the road several hundred feet below the summit where we paid the park entrance fee and walked the mile or so to the top where we looked down into the caldera and had a hazy view of the entire bay of Naples including the Sorrento peninsula and Isle of Capri to the South and Procida and Ischia to the north west. Mario mentioned the haze was primarily from the unusually high humidity that day and not pollution. We spent 20 or so minutes at the top then returned to meet Mario at the drop off point. The drive to Castellammare di Stabia took about 45 minutes and he had to circle around the marina area and ask a couple of times to find Sun Charters (office marked with another charter company sign). The boat was ready early so we unloaded our luggage and send the kids aboard while Val, Holly and I had Mario take us to Auchan Pompei for provisions. Auchan is a supermarket / Mega store akin to Super Walmart in the states. We found everything we could want at very reasonable prices. We even picked up a couple of beach towels and a large "American style" pillow to augment the typical charter boat flat pillows. We spent 149€ on provisions for the week, thinking that we'd augment with local fresh bread and water each morning, eat breakfast and lunch on the boat and dine ashore each night which worked out quite well. We returned to the boat, arriving right around 5:45. Mario suggested 250€ for the nearly 7 hours of driving (normal rate is 100€ from Naples + 30€ / hour) and I threw in another

20€ tip (not expected in Italy but, alas, American habits die hard). Certainly, the hired van was a bit of a pricey extravagance but, the convenience and Mario's local knowledge to get us the Pizza, tour of Naples, and especially finding the Charter company lead me to consider this money well spent. Nick, Scott and I did the boat check-out with Sun Charter personnel while the rest went ashore in search of Gelato and dinner. The check out was fairly basic with going through running the motor, explaining the instruments, and going through the electrical panel. Asked for and received helpful suggestions on good anchorages at the Islands and confirmation that Agropoly was worth a visit. I received the equipment list which I did inventory separately. When asked, I said we'd stay aboard that evening but would like to leave early in the morning. As the boat was completely blocked in, we were told to wait for Sun Charter dock personnel to clear things out before we attempted to leave. It would be no earlier than 8:30AM (which is mid-day by my clock). As we were still full from our pizza lunch, we spent the evening at a fruit bar adjacent the marina sharing the Misto Grande fresh fruit plate (13€) and then walked to town square for the best value Gelato of the trip at Mago del Gelo (1.5€ for 2 scoops!) The evening temperature was still above 80 degrees and there was little breeze in the harbor so all but Val and Holly elected to sleep on deck. Unfortunately, loud music from the bar ashore continued until 2:00AM so I didn't get a lot of sleep. We had a key for the marina shower and toilet but the shower drain was clogged making it a wet mess. We elected to go aboard the boat. Fortunately, things were cleaned up when we returned a week later.

Sunday - While we were awaiting our turn to leave dock, the charterer next to us grew impatient and decided to leave on their own. They fired up the motor, cast off lines, and proceeded out of the slip, turning to avoid several boats rafted in front. Unfortunately, they failed to disconnect shore power which resulted in all kinds of commotion with the dock hands and a sudden flurry of activity to free them from the electrical tether and prevent collision with the boats rafted in front. Eventually they were set free and went their merry way. Since we now had plenty of help nearby, I was able to get the boats immediately in front of me moved out and we were able to leave. As we made sure to disconnect shore power before we cast off, our departure was uneventful.

We sailed west along the Sorrento peninsula with a 11kt north-east wind. We passed the time sailing by putting out a hammock on the spare halyard which the kids took turns swinging out over the water, occasionally getting dunked in passing waves. It's a favorite pastime for the kids during our sails. We turned south into Boca Piccolo and left marina Grande of Capri to starboard as we rounded the Sorrento peninsula. We were now in a south-east wind which as the day wore on decayed to 7-8kt. We put out the iron sail and casually motor-sailed past XXX, on which legend has it, lived the Sirens of Homer fame. I can only figure the motor drowned out any music that otherwise would have lured us to a terrible fate on the rocky shore there. There

was a constant flow of yachts, cruisers, and small ferrys all along the Amalfi coast. Although prohibited by designation as marine sanctuary, many boats were anchored just offshore.

We arrived Positano late in the afternoon. The bay at Positano is protected by the land from about 10:00 to 5:00. As the wind was from the north east and there were maybe fifty sail and powerboats anchored, I figured this would be a tolerable place to stay the night. We pulled in close to the east shore near a small restaurant about 300m south of the beach¹ and main swimming area where we dropped anchor in 13 meters of water in between two comparably sized boats. The anchorage was reasonable calm with barely a swell coming from the south west. Between us and shore was a taxi lane where small motor taxis were continually ferrying clients I assume to/from Amalfi. I figured the chop from their wakes would subside come dusk. Our scouting party took the dingy to check things out and found that the restaurant near us was only open for lunch and beach area at town was completely packed with sunbathers on towels or under umbrellas. You couldn't fit another towel anywhere on the beach. Between a small commercial dock and an even smaller water taxi dock was a bit of beach on which we deemed we could use to land our dingy when going to dinner.



I should mention here that our dingy was unbelievably tiny. It was barely longer than it was wide and clearly designed more as a throwable life ring than a craft to ferry people from boat to shore. That said, if taking proper care, you could position two small adults diagonally in the

boat such that as long as there were no waves or ripples, you could hope to motor ashore without getting swamped. Any attempt to jam 4 persons in the dingy would result in what seemed like 2.5" of freeboard if perfectly balanced. As we had to get all seven of us to shore that evening, I elected to haul anchor and move up closer to town where we re-anchored about 75 meters south of the swimming area. We would attempt to get everyone ashore in two trips.



Around 7:00, we gathered on the transom to make our run. I would pilot the dingy, we carefully orchestrated entry of each person such that we maintained balance and wouldn't capsize the life ring of a dingy. With four of us aboard, we embarked. Those on the boat later remarked that we looked like four people literally sitting in the water with no sign of a boat below us. Needless to say, we were pretty much soaked from the waist down within a minute or two. To add to the challenge, about halfway to the beach, the 3.3hp Suzuki motor died. I was able to get it restarted but as soon as I increased throttle, it would sputter and die again. After a dozen or so cycles of this, I was able to slowly run the motor just above idle and resume our journey. We put our first three passengers ashore (at least within a few feet of shore, but, we were all wet anyway so, close enough) and I returned to our boat. The dingy motor dies several more times but I was now getting more adept at coaxing it back to life and even getting up to half throttle which was pretty much as fast as you could go without swamping our little life ringy anyway. Before picking up our remaining 3 crew members, we filled the dingy motor with fresh gas

hoping that would improve the odds of making it back. We then headed back to the beach. The motor was now dying constantly and took 6-7 pulls to restart. We barely made it ashore and pulled the dingy up to dry land. We found a nice beach side restaurant and had a pleasant dinner of bruschetta, pizza, and pasta. I think the total came to about 115€ for the 7 of us. After dinner, we walked up through the town past the expensive clothing boutiques and jewelry shops. Down at beachfront, the music and partying was starting up.

We returned to our life ring and pushed it into the water. All attempts to start the motor failed. I wore blisters on both hands as did Jason and Scott. Occasionally it would sputter but never ran for more than a second. The girls walked over to the taxi dock told them of our predicament and asked how much to ferry us to our boat. "Where is your boat?" they asked. "Right over there", pointing to our boat anchored about 175m away. "10€ each", they said. At this point, we determined to row ourselves back. So, four of us piled in, and Scott, Nick and I took turns rowing. Eventually, at Val's suggestion, we switched to paddling which worked a bit better. It only took 20 minutes to get back to the boat at which point Scott turned around to retrieve Holly, Jason, and Julie. We had them walk to the south end of the swimming area to save 100m of paddling from the trip. As Scott approached hunkered down in the center of the life ring, all they could see was the top of his head and the two oars flailing on the sides. He announced; "it is I, your savior". Jason and Scott then paddled back to the boat where we struggled again with fixing the motor until we gave up and went to bed.

The wind had calmed to 1-2kt from the north. Without a breeze, it was uncomfortable below so most of us elected to sleep up top. As expected, the ferry traffic had stopped but there was still a 1-2' swell coming from the southwest. With the slight wind from the north, this put the swells abeam which made for some minor rolling of the boat at anchor. Scott and Jason put mattresses on the foredeck and I did the same just in front of the main traveler. Julie and Nick put up their hammocks between the jib and the main stays. Ashore, the bars were hopping and karaoke music was blaring. Nick was the first to succumb followed by Julie as the rocking of the boat was amplified by the hammock configurations launching them well outside of the railing. As the night and karaoke wore on, the swells increased and the rocking of the boat grew more violent. Pots and pans below were banging around and a ceiling panel broke loose in the forward cabin. Our mattresses were sliding on the decks as we all went below into the heat to ride out a sleepless night. Come first light at 5:45, we hauled anchor and left Positano behind heading south east to Agropoli.

Monday - We crossed the gulfo di Salerno with a pleasant 12kt east wind which decayed to 6kt south-east as we arrived Agropoli at 11:00. As we pulled into the marina, Scott called ahead to Porto Agropoli – Pontile Yachting Club (39.366.371.6316) to announce our arrival. Since Scott speaks Romanian, we figured he should be the one to make calls in Italian. It turns out

Romanian and Italian are not too close at all. Scott tried to tell them that we had a 13 meter boat coming in, but didn't know the word for boat. He said the first one that seemed right: gatto. That word was not right at all. He had proclaimed that we were bringing in a 13 meter cat. Upon arrival to the marina, we quickly learned that Agropoli was not the typical tourist town we had become accustomed to in Florence, Rome, and Castellammare; in fact, most people spoke no English, and if they did, it was very limited. The dock manager told us that we could stay at the marina for 90€ per night. He also summoned a mechanic to fix our pathetic dinghy motor. The mechanic told us he didn't speak English well, but he was able to communicate to us that he would be taking the motor to his "office" and would bring it back the next day. He was true to his word; he brought it back in the morning working perfectly! The dock manager also arranged for a taxi driver (Antonella Vessichio- 333.922.3048) to take us to Paestum. The drive to Paestum was about 20 minutes long. Once we arrived there, we were impressed by the ancient Greek ruins and the relative lack of tourists. Wandering the grounds of Paestum, we passed three temples in great condition. There were also many living quarters that were interesting to see. There is a museum in Paestum with ancient artifacts, including art, pottery, and sculptures.



We spent about two hours at Paestum and then had our same taxi driver take us back to the marina. As he drove through town our driver said we really should spend some time at the castle on the hill and in the town centre. "Agropoli is a very good tourist place". From the marina, we walked to get gelato and attempted to go to the beach close by. The beach, though seemingly popular with the locals, did not look quite appealing enough for us to join them. There was a lot of sea vegetation and flotsam that had washed up on shore; so much, in fact, that a local older woman was trying to comb it off the beach with a rake. There were nicer beaches that could have been reached by taxi further up the coast², but we chose to hang out in town. In the afternoon, a small thunderstorm approached the area. The rigging from all of the boats made a unique howl that Holly said "could haunt your soul". We walked on top of the land barrier that separated the marina from the open sea to see the storm and the rush of boats making for the safety of the harbor. We admired the statue of Mary, who, according to legend, protected all the sailors who went to sea. For dinner, we went to a restaurant overlooking the marina and had pizza. Afterwards, we spiraled up the hillside roads to reach the castle dating back to 1300 b.c. which sits on the highest point of the city. The castle had been expanded and reinforced over the centuries up until it was occupied by Napoleonic troops in 1800. It is in pristine condition and is free to the public. Each of us couldn't help but feel a little bit like royalty, being able to walk up on each turret and into hidden chambers. The castle has beautiful vistas of the sea and the hillside city, framed by the beautiful flowers places around the structure. We got even more gelato outside the castle walls and then returned for a concert in the courtyard. Afterwards, we walked back down to the marina through Carnival-esque lighted archways of the town centre. By this time, it was after dark, so all of the locals were out going to dinner or shopping. We purchased several bags of dried spices and fresh basil from some local farmers on our way back to the boat. That night, the marina was quiet and peaceful. Some of us were even able to sleep in hammocks while visions of sugar plum-flavored gelato danced in our heads. All in all, Agropoli was our favorite stop of the trip.



Tuesday – Jason and I arose early and, following our noses, found the bakery in town where we picked up our daily fresh bread and filled our empty bottles with “aqua di la vita” from the town spigot. Departure time was dictated by the return of our dingy motor repairman who had firmly rebuffed my request the previous evening to have the motor back by 7:00Am and offered instead to return no later than 10:00AM. True to his word, he arrived at 9:30 with the motor which was sporting fresh gas, an overhauled carburetor, and a new spark plug. It started smartly and ran flawlessly the rest of the trip. We left Agropoli at 10:00 in a 9kt wind from the north which transitioned to 18kts from the west as the day wore on. As we were headed WNW, to Capri, we were beating most of the afternoon with swells approaching 4'. We found we made better headway by putting in a reef. We arrived Isola Faraglioni just to the SE of Capri at 7:00 where we attempted to pick up a mooring in a small bay but attendants at the small restaurant/hotel ashore told us we could not stay there for the night. They suggested anchoring in the large bay just to the west but there were numerous boats already there and a south swell building. With the memory of unpleasant night at Positano still fresh in our minds, we elected to turn around Pt Di Massulio and anchored in 15m inside a small bay along with one other sailboat and a huge motor yacht on the eastern end of Capri which was fairly well protected on 3 sides and only exposed to the east facing the Sorrento peninsula a few miles across the Boca Piccolo. Here we spent a quiet evening cooking and eating dinner aboard below the massive cliffs of Capri. Sleeping was fairly comfortable with calm conditions and minimal swell.



Wednesday – We woke up early and motored in calm conditions clockwise around Capri to the Blue Grotto, arriving there just after 7:00am. We were hoping to go into the Blue Grotto before all of the tourist boats came in, and we did make it there while no other boats were around, but the tide was high and the swells were just large enough that there was no way we could make it safely into the grotto (even in our life ring). The sun was also too low that early in the morning to get the blue effect inside the cave. Disappointed, we ventured on, heading northwest towards Ischia with a 6-9 kt east wind. We sailed past the castle that stood on the eastern point of the island to check out Porto d’Ischia. Hundreds of boats and incessant ferry traffic there caused us to sail back around the point with the castle and anchor in 8m water in a large bay just south of Castello Ischia along with several dozen other boats. The castle was on a small island separated from the actual island of Ischia, but a causeway had been built connecting the islands, so our anchorage was nicely separated from the massive ferry traffic on the other side of the causeway. After anchoring, we set off on the dinghy to get to shore to explore the castle. We tied the dinghy up on a boat launching ramp by several other dinghies just a few feet from the entrance to the castle. The castle itself was 10 € per person, and was well worth the money. An elevator took us up to the top of the fortress, where we explored the castle that was built in 1441. Inside the outer walls of the fortress were several churches, a nunnery, and countless beautiful viewpoints of the island. The tour was self-guided, though we were given a little guidebook we could follow to see all of the castle’s attractions. After seeing

the castle, we went back to the boat, where Gary had finished repairing the macerator pump on the head. We enjoyed a cool swim and went cliff jumping off of the rocks right below the castle. That night, we took the life ringhy ashore (this time without getting soaked – we are getting better at this) and walked across the causeway into the town, where we had dinner for about 120€ at Da Mario Ristorante, which had delicious food and great Wifi (the gnocchi was spectacular!). After dinner, we walked around the town and visited the shops there, where we bought some fantastic lemon-scented soap that Ischia seemed to have a lot of. That night was again filled with the noise of the bars onshore and a tolerable swell; regardless, it was much more pleasant than the sleepless night in Positano.





Thursday – We ventured ashore at 8:00AM and again followed our noses to the town bakery where we purchased our daily bread (fresh Italian bread is wonderful). We hauled anchor and leisurely sailed around the northern side of Procida in a 6kt south wind. Procida marina was another packed mad house of boats and huge ferry traffic transporting cruise excursion and local tourists from Naples. We proceeded around the eastern side of the island past yet another citadel to Cala Di Corricella where we anchored in 3m just outside the breakwater with several other boats. This was the most spectacular setting of the trip where we had a postcard perfect view of the jumble of multicolor flat top houses stacked up the hillside and the citadel to the east. Unlike the hectic frenzy on the north side of the island, there was no ferry traffic and only the occasional fishing boat departing the marina.



We spent a delightful sunset at the citadel and then had the best value dinner of the trip at Pizzaria Fuego on the waterfront. This side of Procida was truly a magical location and second favorite stop of our trip. We spent a very quiet night with a slight north wind and little swell.



Friday - As Holly was skipper for the day, we were going to make another attempt at getting inside the blue grotto at Capri. We sailed south across the gulfo di Napoli arriving the Capri at 11:00 to find several hundred tourists bobbing in water taxis awaiting their turn to be shuttled in groups of 4 at a time into the bathtub drain sized hole in the rock known as the blue grotto. We watched as the burly rower would pull up alongside the water taxis, swap 4 tourists, collect the 14€/ea rower fee, row to the park concession where each tourist would pay the 12€ park fee, then await their turn to enter the hole. What had been obvious to the rest of us days earlier, finally sunk in on Holly that maybe the “Blue Grotto experience” is not a “must do” after all. We set sail and leisurely made our way back to Castellammare stopping at the fuel dock for 21 liters of diesel before tying up at the dock.

Saturday - At the end of our charter, we used the local train to go to Pompeii and then to Naples Terminal for 2.90€ each which is a fantastic value. Arrived Pompeii at opening and pretty much had the place to ourselves for an hour until all the Cruise Ship excursions arrived and completely overran the place.

1 – The term “beach” is used throughout our story. However, the beaches we encountered cruising the Naples bay area and nearby islands bear no resemblance to beaches we are normally used to. They are simply areas near the sea that are not comprised of jagged rock or cliffs. They are typically less than 100m long, a few meters wide and comprised of small pebbles and larger stones up to the size of a chicken egg. Even then, virtually every beach (and even nearby boulders) we encountered were covered with tourists on towels and beach cabanas during daylight hours. Any sand, if it ever existed in these areas, has long since been spirited away on the feet, shoes, or bathing suit bottoms of innumerable beach visitors over the millenia. I hear, and even visually confirmed as we were driving to Paestum, that beaches on the lower end of the Bay of Salerno were significantly larger and even seemed to include sand. They also were much less crowded which of course explains why there is still sand....