Soak in Ischia's Hot Springs on a Cold Day

Italy's thermal wonderland not only offers great natural, open-air jacuzzis, but also perfect spots for slow-cooked picnics straight out of a boiling pool. Ideal, even for a winter day.

It was one of those bitterly cold December days in southern Italy, when the chill wraps itself around your bones and draws you towards winter, and I was freezing to the seat of my newly-rented scooter.

The frosted palms and agave plants blurred at my sides as I tore down the mountain, enduring the icy gales for the tropical target that lay ahead: one of Italy's wildest and most unique thermal spas.

My girlfriend and I had arrived on Ischia, the largest and the greenest island in the bay of Naples, only that morning.

After securing our transport, we set off to explore the volcanic island and soon discovered that, though it may not be as famous as the nearby celebrity resort of Capri, the almost entirely mountainous Ischia - with its rugged landscape, secluded beaches and glistening fig and lemon trees-certainly rivals it for natural beauty.

Then there are the hot springs. Ischia is home to the largest concentration of natural spas in Europe, which have been soothing joints and curing ailments since Roman times.

Nowadays the island is inevitably dominated by a plethora of all-inclusive spa resorts, but we'd vowed to avoid these tourist traps before leaving the mainland. We knew there were still many wild and untapped natural springs on the island that could be enjoyed completamente gratuito, so we went in search of one of them - one of the most unique and secluded of all. Il Sorgeto.

The bracing wind swept around the cliff top, so we pulled our jackets tight around us and began our slow descent to the golden bay below.

We could feel the heat before we could see the springs. Small freshwater streams dribbled over the sand into the salty sea and vast plumes of steam gushed into the cyan winter sky. We had found it: a free, wild and boundless salty bathtub to warm our cockles.

Quite literally, in fact... because this natural phenomenon was more than just a Jacuzzi to us.

> 'Blistering hot springs and chilled sea tide combine'

We had stopped in the food market en route to Il Sorgeto and, upon arrival, began shifting stones on the beach to form a primitive cooking pot - directly above a natural spring.

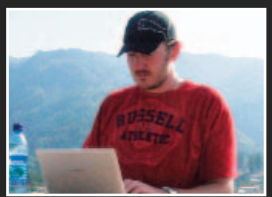
As we waited on our food to cook in the just-below-boiling freshwater, we enjoyed a nice long soak in one of Europe's finest sea spas; where the blisteringly hot springs and the chilled sea tide combine in perfect quantities for the ideal bathing temperature. No elbow gauge necessary.

Before we knew it, dinner was served. We laid a picnic blanket down on our private beach, complete with under floor heating and en-suite spa, and enjoyed a gourmet meal of lemon mullet and mixed seafood with potatoes, courgettes and squash - served with a bottle of fine Italian red, naturally - as we watched the sun slowly set over the shimmering Mediterranean.

Not a bad way to spend a bitterly cold winter day.

Above: Joe prepares a slow-cooked dinner in anatural hot spring. Below: The beach and springs at Il Sorgeto. JoRe

Writer Profile



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