



Chef Marc Murphy's Food Tour of the Amalfi Coast



Celebrity chef Marc Murphy (you know him from Food Network's *Chopped*, as well as restaurants like Landmarc) shares his favorite eats from his family's recent trip to the Amalfi coast, which was heavy on seafood, pizza, and lemons.

Despite having spent much of my youth in Italy, I had never made it to the Amalfi Coast. With a family vacation to enjoy and an assignment to do (menu research for a Mediterranean-inspired restaurant), the decision to head to this storied coastline was easy. Using the Hotel Marincanto in Positano as a base, my wife, two kids, and I spent a week eating our way through Italy. Here are some of the highlights.

DAY ONE

Meal of the day: Dinner at Positano institution [Chez Black](#). It's been around since 1949 and rumor has it that it's named for its owner's perma-tan. The restaurant's famous spaghetti with sea urchin is worth the visit: It's served in a giant bowl that looks like a sea urchin (spines included) and the waiters aggressively encourage you to wear a ridiculous bib when eating it, but I promise that's an offense you can easily get past once you have your first taste of the dish's sublime flavor. Equally delicious are the views and location, right on the main drag.

Tip: Eat on the road. Any rest stop, and I do mean *any* rest stop, will have some of the best food you have ever eaten—don't kill yourself trying to find a restaurant somewhere off the highway. On the way to Positano, we stopped at a random rest area two hours south of Rome, and the prosciutto-and-mozzarella sandwich I ate there was transcendent. Bonus: Every rest stop has a proper espresso bar and an enormous selection of artisanal products—pastas, cheeses, and desserts.



DAY TWO

Meal of the day: Dinner at [Next2](#), a newer, upscale spot in Positano. It had been recommended by a local friend and we were promised a sublime experience, so we made the trek, on foot, down one side of the mountain and up the other. We started with an incredible amuse-bouche of simple tomato bruschetta with a superb basil pesto. It foreshadowed the great things to come: a flawless balance of simple ingredients reimagined to be so much more than simple.

We started with *pizzettes*—lightly, perfectly fried pizza dough with a center of warm mozzarella and tomato—a homemade *tagliolini* with bitter greens and garlic, and smoked mozzarella and vegetable croquettes (the latter was reminiscent of my smoked mozzarella and ricotta fritters at [Landmarc](#), but with a coastal twist). Main courses included tender meatballs served over crispy polenta, lamb chops with a cauliflower purée, and hearty cannelloni with beef ragù. Dessert was a strawberry mille feuille and a Torta Caprese—something we saw a lot of in this part of Italy—flourless chocolate cake with ground almonds. And here's a tip: When you make your reservation at Next2, make sure to request outside dining—the view of the Gulf of Naples from the restaurant's terrace is stunning.

DAY THREE

Meal of the day: Dinner at [La Tagliata](#), a family-run restaurant high above Positano. The restaurant's shuttle bus service picked us up from our hotel. I sat in the front seat and proceeded to have the most frightening experience of my life: We whipped around curves, hung perilously close to the edge of the cliff-side roadway, and, once we arrived, one of the poor kids in the back (thankfully, not one of mine) was retching. (Tip: Take a taxi there instead; it will make for a more comfortable ride, both physically and emotionally.)

Don't let any of the above dissuade you from a visit—the food at La Tagliata is as stellar as the view. The restaurant is like a tree house perched on top of a mountain. I cannot fathom how they ever built it, or how they get their deliveries. Served family-style, the food started and just kept coming: fresh vegetables, peas and bacon, sautéed spinach, zucchini salad, eggplant parmesan, homemade pastas, gnocchi in tomato sauce, ravioli filled with zucchini and ricotta, cannelloni with ricotta. Then came a huge platter of grilled meats: chicken, lamb, beef, rabbit, pork sausage, with homemade fried potatoes and a mixed green salad. The meal, done with an authentic and friendly hand, was a welcome change from what we had been eating all week.

DAY FOUR

Meal of the day: Lunch, poolside, at the [Hotel Belmond Caruso](#) in Ravello, just east of Positano. We faced the typically-harrowing Amalfi coast drive to Ravello in order to dine at The Belvedere, the hotel's main restaurant, which we had read a lot about. Unfortunately, their outdoor seating area was closed, but they offered us a table at their more casual restaurant by the pool—and we were not disappointed.

The restaurant had an open kitchen with a pizza oven and a salad bar, the likes of which I had never seen: it offered three kinds of anchovies (one with steamed broccoli, which was outstanding), handmade mozzarella knots, and perfectly fried zucchini chips. We had a beautiful rosé and a perfect lunch: a light and crispy pizza margherita, fried anchovies, linguine con vongole, steamed clams and mussels with tomatoes, and a moist whole fish steamed with lemon. For dessert we had a *delizie al limone* (an individual sponge cake filled and topped with lemon cream). Notice a lemon trend? Yes, the citrus fruits grow abundantly in this part of Italy.



DAY FIVE

Meal of the day: Lunch at [Lo Scoglio da Tommaso](#), quite possibly my favorite restaurant in the world. We pulled up to the Hotel Lo Scoglio's dock (run by the same family since opening in 1958) and were greeted by Antonia De Simone, daughter of proprietor, Peppino. She was delightful and quick to introduce us to her father, her sister, her cousin, another cousin who is related only by marriage, and everyone in the kitchen—all related in one way or another.

The menu is large, but the list of daily specials is larger and the smart move is to order from what they have fresh that day. That day's antipasto included marinated anchovies, arugula with baby tomatoes, and large tomatoes with basil, fresh mozzarella, raw sea urchin and baby clams. And then the pastas—we had four different spaghettis, each better than the next: zucchini, basil and parmesan, yellow tomato and basil, and sea urchin. And then, for our main course, we shared a whole baked fish with lemon, olive oil, capers and potatoes—a contender for final meal ever (if I ever had to make that difficult choice). This is the type of place you hear about but can only dream of ever really finding.

Tip: When staying in Positano (or anywhere on the Amalfi Coast for that matter), spend a day on the water. We rented a small boat from [Lucibello](#) and explored the coast with a visit to the Amalfi Island and its Le Corbusier-designed hideaway once owned and a stop at Lo Scoglio da Tommaso restaurant for lunch. It was well worth it.



DAY SIX

Meal of the day: Dinner at [Ambasciata d'Abruzzo](#), perhaps my favorite restaurant in the city I grew up in: Rome. Located in a residential neighborhood away from the city center, we've been eating at this comfort food *ristorante* for 15 years and have never been disappointed. The food is old-school: Each meal starts with a basket of cured meats and sausages served with a huge knife and a cutting board. Pastas are large and delicious, and the roasted meats are perfection and a great change from all of the seafood we ate on the coast.

Tip: For gelato in the Eternal City head to [Giolitti Gelateria](#) near the Pantheon, not just for their world-renowned gelato, but for the old-school waiter service as well.