

Calabria



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1. Calabria, "Italy's Best Kept Secret"

Calabria is "Italy's Best Kept Secret", and is one of the most beautiful parts of the country, with perfect weather year-round and a relaxed, Italian way of life. Calabrian properties are the best value for money around, and for the investor it offers great rental potential and fabulous appreciation over the next number of years.

Calabria properties are beach front or within a few minutes of the beach. A two-bedroom apartment in Calabria can rent for a few euro's a month in July and August.

The Calabrese People - Like the food they love, the Calabrese people are fiery and warm, open and welcoming. They will adore your children, welcome you into their homes and generally treat you like long lost friends. Traditionally hospitable and eager to share the beauty of the region they live in, you will find yourself making friends quickly and easily - and you won't want to leave! Calabria may be one of Italy's least famous regions, but the toe of Italy has played a large part in Italian culture.

The famous tarantella dance originated in Calabria, and famous Calabrians include the late fashion designer Gianni Versace, Charles Atlas (the original world's strongest man) and Hollywood actor Nick Mancuso.

Bianco - One of the hidden gems of the Calabrian region - properties are within walking distance of the town, by the beach and surrounded by picturesque woodlands. This is peace and tranquility, with some of the most beautiful scenery in the whole of Italy. Bianco delivers the taste of true Italy, flavours of a colourful past reflected in street parades and parties. There are spectacular wine festivals, open-air theatres and celebrations of the natural world.

Bianco and the neighbouring town of Bovalino both have a good selection of bars, café's and restaurants. For a traditional dining experience there are Italian trattorias or pizzerias, while keen cooks will find that Bianco has the finest ingredients imaginable, available from well-stocked supermarkets and stores. Calabrese cuisine includes a wide variety of colourful vegetables (this is one of Italy's main agricultural centres) so vegetarians will not be disappointed. The town has a chemist, beauty salons, an Internet café, boutiques, butchers and a delicatessen. There are also medical centres, post offices and banking facilities in Bianco and Bovalino.

The Capital - Reggio di Calabria - with its position on the Straits of Messina facing Sicily and the stunning snow capped peak of Mount Etna, is an elegant and dynamic place to spend time. It is from there you can get cheap, regular ferries to Sicily, to go scuba diving and visit some of the most breathtaking archaeological museums in Italy.

There are daily flights to Calabria through Ryanair from Stanstead to Lamezia, or alternatively from other parts of the country you can fly into Rome with Easyjet, British Airways or Alitalia, and then connect through Alitalia to Lamezia or Reggio Di Calabria (which is the regions capital).

2. History of Calabria

Calabria is one of the oldest regions in Italy. The presence of humans in this region dates back to 700,000 years B.C.: a type of Homo erectus evolved leaving many signs along coastal areas. Many traces from the Mid-Paleolithic Period and Stone Age have been found. During the Neolithic Period, man changed from hunter to farmer, and found the first villages. During the Iron Age new people came to Calabria and around 1500 B.C. the prehistoric phase ended.

Greeks arrived in large masses on the coasts and founded colonies that soon became rich and powerful, and truly merited the name of "Magna Grecia" Before the Roman conquest, the inhabitants of the south part of Calabria were called Itali. With the Roman power, the name Italia extended to all regions and with the Emperor Augustus to the whole peninsula. Numerous and infinite traces of Greek and Roman culture were left on the Calabrese territory. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Calabria remained for centuries under the domination of the Byzantines, though Arabs and Lombards tried in vain to conquer the entire territory.

The Normans arrived around 1000 A.D. and created the Kingdom of the South. After the Normans came the Swabians. In the regions of the South, Federico II created one of the most civilised nations in the world, the famous Kingdom of the Sun, a place to encounter a variety of cultures and civilizations: Western, Islamic and Greek Orthodox.

In 1250 Federico II died and the reign fell into the hands of the Angioini, who created an "iron-fisted" feudal system to control the territory. The Angioini were followed by the Aragonese, Spanish, Austrians and Bourbons, and during these periods the population withdrew to the mountains and highlands because of the malaria and numerous pirate raids along the coast, first the Saracens and then by the Turks. This phenomenon created an internal and external isolation, with the population centres of the highlands and the valleys unable to communicate.

When Italy was unified in 1861, Calabria had only one road that crossed the region from the north to Reggio Calabria in the south. Only the effort of the national government and fascism contributed to break this isolation and today, changes in social and economic conditions have resulted in a radical change of direction. Because of tourism, many population centres are situated along the marine coasts and are becoming more important than their highland counterparts.

3. Interesting Towns in Calabria

Reggio Di Calabria

This town was founded in the second half of the 8th century BC by the Greeks of Eubea and soon became an important centre for trade, political and military power of the Magna Graecia. There is a fine view of both the straits and the Sicilian coast from the seafront promenade, called Lungomare Matteotti, which fringes the city. The remarkable bronze statues of Riace, rare Greek originals from the 5th century BC, are in the Museo Nazionale and really worth a visit.

Cosenza

Set in a lovely hilly setting, the town has an ancient quarter clinging to the Colle Pancrazio, and a modern quarter in the plain below. Its humanistic cultural tradition - which lent such renown to the Accademia Cosentina, founded in the 16th century by the great humanist Aulo Giano Parrasio and still in existence - was recently rejuvenated with the establishment of the Università della Calabria, in the nearby town of Arcavacata di Rende. In the old town you may visit the Cathedral, where Isabel of Aragon is buried, and the medieval churches of S.Domenico and S.Francesco.

Crotone

Home of Pythagoras, the site of ancient Kroton has been entirely lost, but in its day this was among the most important colonial settlements of Magna Graecia, with a school of medicine that was famous throughout the classical world.

On the old town's main Corso Vittoria Emunale, the Duomo's chief draw is an icon of the Black Madonna, The new Museo Archeologico Nazionale holds the best collection of finds from Magna Graecia on the Ionian coast.

Alongside good examples of Greek and Roman coins, information about and fragments from the excavations at Crotone and its various colonies, lists of the

Olympic winners who hailed from the city and maps of the digs (the main one right next to the main industrial complex), the museum displays an array of items from Capo Calonna. Most noteworthy of these is the so-called Treasure of Hera, a beautifully restored group of bronze statuettes - including a sphinx, a gorgon, a horse, a winged siren and a very rare nuraghic boat from Sardinia - found in a tomb at Capo Colonna in 1987, and dating from the 7th to the 5th centuries BC. The most dazzling item is a gold diadem, expertly worked with garlands of leaves and sprigs of myrtle.

Vibo Valentia

The ancient Hipponion - here, have a look at the Angevin castle, the 14th century cloister in the church of the Rosary, and the church of San Michele. Also the Byzantine temple of S.Ruba, the ruins of an old Roman baths and the remains of a 6th century Greek acropolis.

Sila

One of Europe's most wooded area with the famous Bosco di Fallistro, where you can admire tall trees which are over 600 years old, the so-called Giganti della Sila. An ideal place for hiking and skiing in winter, Carmigliatello Silano is a charming winter resort town located in this area with well equipped ski trails. It is surrounded by pine forest and close to Lake Cecita.

Tropea

The granite headland of Monte Poro juts out into the Tyrrhenian, forming a massive promontory with its sides sloping down across four sets of terraces between the Gulfs of Sant'Eufemia and Gioia. The town, with enchanting architectural views set in a singular landscape, stands high above the sea, perched on a sheer circular cliff, dominating four kilometres of small beaches separated by rocky outcroppings. This is a beautiful seaside resort with sandy beaches and crystal clear water.

Locri

A town on the Ionian sea with the remains of an ancient Greek city. To visit: the remains of a temple, some town walls, a theatre and the Santuario di Persephone.

Stignano

Don't miss the Villa Caristo, a well preserved traditional Calabrian Baroque home with frescoes, stuccos, a private chapel and a beautiful garden with fountains and an olive press.

Pizzo

Charming, typical Calabrian town with an interesting castle, built by Ferdinand I of Aragon.

Gerace

A medieval hill town with a 12th century castle, and enchanting 11th century Romanesque cathedral with interesting Treasury, and three Byzantine churches, S.Giovanello, Santa Maria del Maestro and Santa Maria del Monserrato.

Serra San Bruno

Don't miss this town with its Carthusian Monastery, founded in 1081 by Saint Bruno. In the monastery you may admire the frescoes and the museum. Have a walk to the nearby church of S.Maria del Bosco, the Grotto of S.Bruno and the Lake of Miracles.

Altomonte

A charming hill town with a beautiful 14th century church, S.Maria della Consolazione. A good base where to explore.

Silo

A hill town on Mount Consolino. Visit the Cathedral, the churches of S.Francesco, S.Giovanni and S.Domencico. However, the main attraction is the Cattolica, a small Byzantine church out of town, with five domes, dating back to the 7th century.

Castrovillari

In this town you may visit the Aragonese castle, the 16th century church of S.Giuliano, the Jewish synagogue, the 11th century sanctuary of S.Maria del Castello, the medieval church of the trinity, and many historical palazzis in the old town.

Capo Vaticano

Between the gulfs of Gioia Tauro and Sant'Eufemia. From here you get a stunning views on the Aeolian islands, looking at the Stromboli volcano.

Corigliano

With a beautiful Aragonese castle

Rossano Calabro

Visit the exquisite 11th century Byzantine church of S.Marco, S.Anna and the Parish Museum which hosts a 6th century manuscript – the Codes purpureus.

4. Traditions and Folklore

Popular traditions and folklore are for Calabria an incommensurable source of wealth which bear witness to its great past. The womens costumes in town with Albanian communities are sumptuous, austere and simple, are those of mountain villages. There is a very strong religious tradition in Calabria.

At Easter and Christmas, for centuries, customs, celebrations and theatres, in which all the inhabitants participate, have been handed down. Even Carnival has its own customs which, when they do not draw on ancient texts, provide actors with an opportunity to put their imagination and creativity to the test.

The folklore events in the towns with Albanian communities are tormented with their leitmotiv of yearning for the exaltations of Scanderberg, the Arbreshes national hero. There are innumerable village festivals for local products, such as those for mushrooms, chestnuts, the grain and grape harvest, and so forth.

All of the above have a common characteristic, they are choral events whose protagonists are the sentiments, traditions and cultural roots of all Calabrians.