



Panoramic view of Marina Grande, Scilla - Province of Reggio Calabria

The Calabria region is a long narrow peninsula in the extreme south of Italy. It is the toe of Italy's boot. The region is surrounded on three sides by the Mediterranean Sea, the Ionian Sea to the east and the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west and is separated from Sicily by the two-mile-wide Strait of Messina to the south. It's considered to be the Caribbean of Europe thanks to its pristine beaches, stunning landscape, and rustic charms. The Calabria region, formed in 1948, is the 10th largest region in Italy in terms of population with 1,959,050 people. The most populous cities in Calabria are: Reggio Calabria (Population: 169,140), Catanzaro (Population: 78,970), Lamezia Terme (Population: 70,501), Cosenza (Population: 63,852) and Nicastro-Sambiase (Population: 55,687). The provinces of Calabria are: Reggio Calabria (located at the tip of the toe), Cosenza, Crotona, Catanzaro (regional capital located in the center), and Vibo Valentia. Over 90% of Calabria is covered by hills and mountains upon which sit hundreds of small towns and villages.

History: The Greeks ruled Calabria for 400 years beginning in 800 B.C. and named it Magna Grecia (Greater Greece). The Greeks brought their advanced political system, law, and civilization to the region, as well as olive trees, fig trees, and grape vines, which would prove to be the source of Calabria's economy for centuries to come. Calabria then became part of the Roman Empire for the next 800 years beginning in 400 B.C. The Roman invasion brought stability which was only briefly interrupted by the Second Punic War. Thereafter, nearly every major power in the western world occupied Calabria, including the Byzantines, Saracens, Normans, Spanish, French, and Bourbons. It was the Byzantines who began calling the area Calabria, which means "fertile earth." It was at this time Catholicism and many holy orders and buildings cropped up. Over two hundred years of petty-minded barony, Spanish fiscal control, coupled with an unusual spate of earthquakes, disease, and famine forced the region to decline. The Risorgimento (Italian Unification) of the 19th century saw many peasant revolts as part of the European Revolutions of 1848. This set the stage for the eventual unification with the rest of Italy in 1861, when the Kingdom of Naples was brought into the union by Giuseppe Garibaldi. The Aspromonte was the scene of a famous battle of the unification of Italy, in which Garibaldi was wounded. The arrival of Garibaldi and Italian unification inspired hope for change, but Calabria remained a disappointed, feudal region. A byproduct of this tragic history was the growth of banditry and organized crime. Calabria's Mafia, known as the 'ndrangheta (from the Greek for heroism/virtue), instilled fear in the region. For many, the only answer was to get out and, for at least a century, Calabria saw many of its young emigrate in search of a better life. In 1900, Umberto I was assassinated, and Vittorio Emanuele II became king. In 1915 Italy entered World War I on the side of the Allies, but the unsettled post-war atmosphere gave rise to fascism. Benito Mussolini was elected to Parliament in 1921 and then was appointed Prime Minister of Italy by Vittorio Emanuele II in 1925. Three years later, "Il Duce" dissolved Parliament and established himself as dictator. During the time of fascism, the poor continued to struggle. Mussolini's alignment with Hitler and Nazi Germany and the country's entry into World War II against France and Great Britain in 1940 made things worse. A series of rebellions by the people ensued and Italy surrendered to the Allies in 1943. Mussolini was captured and killed in 1945. In a historic vote in 1946, Italians voted to abolish the monarchy, exile the royal family of Savoy because of its support for fascism, and establish a republic. With

the adoption of a constitution in 1948, Italy became the parliamentary republic that it is today. The transfer of the provincial capital to Catanzaro in 1971 resulted in widespread riots in Reggio di Calabria. Following a compromise, Reggio remained the Regional Assembly's permanent seat.

Language: Although standard Italian is taught in all schools, the older Calabresi still speak with a dialect in family settings that is very similar to the Sicilian dialect. In the northern regions, the dialect more closely resembles the Neapolitan language. As is common in many regions of Italy, each town has their own dialects as well.

Economy: Agriculture and tourism are the main pillars supporting Calabria's economy. Calabria ranks as the second most productive region of Italy for olive oil and is the largest producer of Porcini mushrooms.

Food: The cuisine is a typical southern Italian Mediterranean cuisine with a balance between meat-based dishes (pork, lamb, goat), vegetables (especially eggplant), and fish. Pasta is also very important in Calabria. Calabrians have traditionally placed an emphasis on the preservation of their food and packing vegetables and meats in olive oil. If there is a fundamental ingredient to Calabrese cooking, it would be the peperoncino. Calabrese cooking tends toward the spicy thanks to the generous use of various varieties of hot peppers in regional cuisine. Olio Santo, olive oil infused with hot pepper, is sometimes added to a plate of pasta to give it a little extra zip. Some of the most popular dishes are: Alici ripieni, stuffed anchovies, Sardella is a spicy paste made with olive oil, mashed baby sardines and hot pepper, Pasta ccu ri sarde, fresh sardines with pasta dish breadcrumbs, raisins and pine nuts, Ciambotta, is a spicy eggplant stew with chili, tomatoes, onion and herbs the recipe varies from city to city. Lagane e Ciccari is a pasta dish made with wide noodles, chickpeas, garlic and oil. Some Neapolitan specialties such as Braciolo are also common in the region. Some local specialties include Caciocavallo Cheese, this tasty cheese is known for its salty and sharp yet smooth flavor; Pecorino Crotonese (Cheese of Sheep), Cipolla rossa di Tropea (red onion) many of Calabria's vibrant dishes get their flavor from this famous onion (grown in Tropea), recognized by its bold purple-red exterior and sweet flavor! Frittuli and Curcùci (fried pork), Soppessata (Sopressata) is a popular dried sausage typical of the region. Calabria produces almost a quarter of Italy's olive oil often the Calabrian oil is used as a base and mixed with other regions' oil, then labeled as a product of that region! Local desserts are typically fried, honey-sweetened pastries Cudduraci, Nacatole, Scalille or scalidde or baked biscotti-type treats (such as 'nzudda). The most popular is Pignolata or struffoli, these delectable fried honey balls originally come from a Sicilian recipe and are very popular in the region, especially in the city of Reggio Calabria. You'll especially find these in pastry shops around major holidays like Carnevale and Christmas. Calabria's licorice is considered some of the best in the world and is known as *rigulizza* in the local dialect and is beloved for its digestive properties (not to mention the distinctive taste of the gourmet candy!).

REGIONS OF ITALY

By JIM SANO

Drink: In ancient times, Calabria was referred to by the Ancient Greeks as the “land of wine”. Over 90% of the region’s wine production is red wine with a large portion made from the Gaglioppo grape. Calabria is an up-and-coming producer of wines. Two of their best wines are Duale and Nerone di Calabria, Duale is a red, light and fruity wine produced from 100% of Nerello Masca grapes. It has an alcoholic content of 12.5%, a pinkish color with ruby red hues, it’s refined in steel tanks, and is successfully paired with a variety of dishes. Nerone di Calabria is produced from 30% of Sangiovese grapes and 70% of Nerello Calabrese. Nerone is a structured, full-bodied red wine refined in small oak barrels. It has an alcoholic content of 14%, and an intense ruby red color. Nerone is a complex wine, more spicy than fruity, and goes well with red meat, strong cheeses, and spicy dishes. Another popular drink is Liquore al bergamotto, it is the region’s digestive liqueur made from the juice of the extremely tart bergamot orange. This drink is like limoncello.

Religion: The region is predominately Roman Catholic. Calabria is known as “The Land of the Saints,” since it is the birthplace of an unusually large number of Italian saints. The patron saint of Calabria is St. Francis of Paola. Catholic tradition remains strong in Calabria as nearly every church in town still celebrates an annual feast with a procession honoring its patron saint.

Nature and Sights: Calabria is known for its pristine unspoiled nature, crystal clear sea, clean white sandy beaches, and lots of historical places. Calabria’s rugged sun-drenched coastline and hot climate are ideal for scuba diving around Tropea and Capo Vaticano, while the Ionian coast offers wonderful conditions for surfing. The mountainous region (Peaks of the Apennines) is home to three national parks: Sila National Park, Pollino National Park, and Aspromonte National Park. Some other beautiful places to visit in Calabria are: Gerace, sometimes called “the Florence of the South” because of all its churches, Stilo, (Byzantine brick temple), Scalea, spa resort town, Reggio Calabria home to Museo (museum) Nazionale Della Magna Grecia and Vibo Valentia, a former Greek colony, featuring a historic center, a Romanesque church and Archaeological Museum. The Historic center of Cosenza has a domo built in the 12th



Santa Maria dell'Isola - Tropea - Calabria



Palaces of the old town of Tropea perched on a Cliff overlooking the beach below - Province of Vibo Valentia, Calabria

century where Isabel of Aragon’s grave is, also located here are the government palace and theater. Chianalea di Scilla is a picture perfect Mediterranean beach town with boardwalk, restaurants shops and the clearest water you can imagine. Currently, there is also significant development of agritourism that attracts visitors to the local homesteads, farms, and estates where you can get acquainted with the local rural life and local specialties.

Weather: Calabria is characterized by a warm and pleasant climate where you can enjoy summer from early April to late October. The ideal season here lasts from May to July, when the air temperature is around 86°F. In July and especially in August, the temperature is around 104°F, which can be unpleasant for most people.

Conclusion: Like a sturdy toe in the world’s oldest boot, there you’ll find Calabria, a cradle of history that lives on through its self-reliant and rugged people who epitomize the qualities of southern Italians; devotion to family, a strong work ethic, respect for elders and unwavering faith. These attributes made Calabria what it is today and has allowed so many of its descendants to be successful in America. The Calabresi have produced many well-known Italian Americans including Tony Bennett, Connie Francis, Leon Panetta, Lou Costello, and Jerry Vale.