

What to do in Pompeii: the complete guide to planning your visit



# What to do in Pompeii: the complete guide to planning your visit

By Floriane

A visit to Pompeii is a **must at least once in a lifetime**. Walking through this city, frozen in time for 2,000 years, is like stepping back in time.

# What to do in Pompeii: the complete guide to planning your visit

Before embarking on your adventure, it's best to be well prepared. The **Pompeii archaeological site** is huge and often crowded, and good organization makes all the difference. You're probably wondering:

- Where can you buy **tickets for Pompeii**?
- Which districts to explore? How to avoid the heat and crowds?
- How to avoid the heat and crowds?

During our stay in Naples, it was impossible to resist going there. With a toddler in tow, we wanted to take it easy, savor every discovery and avoid the long lines.

In this guide, you'll find our **detailed itinerary** for discovering **Pompeii's** most **beautiful spots, practical information** (access, opening hours, tickets, tips) and our favorites for prolonging the experience.

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## Practical information and entrance tickets for Pompeii

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### Address and access

- **Train:** Circumvesuviana train from Naples (45 minutes) or Sorrento (40 minutes)
  - **Car:** rent a car from Naples + free on-site parking
  - **Shuttle:** book a [direct shuttle from Naples](#)
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### Tickets

- [Pompei Plus admission ticket with audio guide](#)
- [Guided tour with an archaeologist \(in French\)](#)
- 1-day [combined ticket \(Vesuvius + Pompeii\)](#) from Naples

However, we do recommend that you take a guided tour in French. It's not much more expensive, but you'll get a lot more information and anecdotes about the ruins.

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### Opening hours

- **Summer period (April 1 to October 31):** 9 am to 7 pm (last entry at 5 pm).
- **Winter period (November 1 to March 31):** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (last entry at 3:30 p.m.).
- **Annual closure:** December 25, January 1 and May 1.

**Tip:** Arrive as soon as it opens to avoid the crowds, or in the afternoon when the tourist groups start to leave.

## Best time to visit

- **April to June and September to October:** Pleasant weather and fewer crowds.
- **In summer:** Avoid midday because of the heat, and opt for guided tours to optimize your time.

**First Sunday of each month:** free admission (please note, very busy).

## Hotels

**In Naples:** [Information and booking for the Hotel Garibaldi room](#), right in the center of town

**In Pompeii** to be **the first on the site:** [Information and booking for the Il Vecchio Fauno hotel](#), with parking, 5 minutes' walk from the ruins.

## Tickets for Pompeii: which one to choose?

There are 3 types of tickets to visit Pompeii:

- **The Pompeii Express ticket:** allows you to visit the interior of the ancient city walls.
- **Pompeii Plus ticket** (our recommendation): allows you to discover the interior of the ancient city walls, as well as 2 suburban villas adjoining the site (the Villa of Diomedes + the Villa of the Mysteries) + the Villa Regina in Boscoreale.
- **3-day ticket** with access to the entire site

Ticket type	Adult	Young people (aged 18-25)	Children (under 18)
Pompeii Express	20 €	2 €	Free

<b>Ticket type</b>	<b>Adult</b>	<b>Young people (aged 18-25)</b>	<b>Children (under 18)</b>
<a href="#">Pompeii Plus</a>	25 €	2 €	Free
3-day package	30 €	2 €	Free

## Where to buy your tickets?

Around 3 million people visit Pompeii every year. As you'll see once you're there, it's busy everywhere, all the time.

Many booking platforms offer tickets for sale. For our part, we use the [Get Your Guide](#) booking site (official reseller), which offers the **possibility of cancelling tickets up to 24 hours before the date of an activity and thus obtaining a full refund.**

[Book your Pompeii Plus ticket + audio guide in French](#)

At the **Porta** Marina entrance, you'll find **dedicated kiosks for electronic ticket holders**.

There will also be plenty of people at the kiosks, but once you've got your ticket in hand, the queue will be shorter than at the regular ticket office.

Free and discounted tickets can be picked up and purchased directly on site.

[The ticket is valid for a single entry](#), i.e. once you leave the site, you can't return with the same ticket.

## **Why book a guided tour and/or audio guide?**

As with most archaeological sites in the region, there are no explanatory panels on site.

We told you about it in our article about Herculaneum, we were very surprised. A site that welcomes 3 million tourists every year **should have the means to add a few explanatory panels, in our opinion...**

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Even though we had had time to prepare our visit in advance, as we had visited Herculaneum the day before, **we wanted to be accompanied on site.**

As you'll see, most visitors to Pompeii are accompanied by a guide.

We therefore advise you either to buy an [audioguide](#) (8€ at the Marina entrance or online) or to book a [guided tour in French](#) (with a guide or an archaeologist).

□ [Pompei Plus admission ticket with audio guide](#)

### The best guided tour of Pompeii

**Favourite ♥** For our second **visit to Pompeii**, we spent 2 hours

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surveying the site with a guide.

We recommend that you travel with [Askos Tours](#) , a company with an excellent reputation and competent French guides.

□ A word of advice in passing, don't forget to [book in advance](#), especially during the tourist season and school vacations like All Saints' Day and Easter, as these excursions are very popular and the number of places is limited. (site entrance ticket included)

[Info and booking for a guided tour of Pompeii with an archaeologist](#)

## Detailed itinerary to visit Pompeii

There are 3 entrances: **Porta Marina** is the main entrance, **where you can pick up your [audio guide](#), Piazza Esedra** and **Piazza Anfiteatro**, the one we took and recommend.

The latter is less busy than its neighbors, so if you get there early you can explore the **Anfiteatro (amphitheatre), the paestra grande (huge gymnasium) and some of the surrounding streets and residences almost on your own.** Next, you'll reach **the area near the Forum**, with its temples and public buildings, which, as you'll see, are much busier.

Here's our itinerary and must-sees, so you don't miss a thing when you get there.

We start from the door located at the Anfiteatro. **If you are arriving from Porta Marina, to pick up your audio guide for example, you just need to do our itinerary in the opposite direction!**

### 1. Anfiteatro (amphitheatre) ♥♥

It is one **of the oldest Roman amphitheaters visible to this day almost intact.** Its size is impressive, 20,000 spectators could attend the gladiatorial shows.

Today, concerts are held there, and there's even a permanent exhibition on the artists who have trodden its soil, such as Pink Floyd.

### 2. Palestra grande (big palestra - gymnasium) ♥

This is **the old gymnasium**, where gladiators used to train. Again, the building is huge. It is from this point on that we begin to understand the magnitude of the city.

Some showcases in which are exposed objects, food (several **breads** found in the ovens...) or plants(**chestnuts, figs...**) found during the excavations allow to better understand, at which season took place the eruption (at the beginning of the autumn).

### **3. Orto dei fuggiaschi (Fugitive's garden)**

We did not linger on this showcase, presenting **several bodies molded in plaster**, trying to escape the catastrophe. It is a very moving reminder of the drama that took place here in the year 79.

#### 4. Thermopoliums (Pompeii's taverns) ♥♥

You'll see plenty of them along the way. These **little taverns are generally well-preserved**, with the **earthenware jars** (which held the hot dishes) still integrated into the counter.

#### 5. Casa del Casti Amanti (House of Chaste Lovers)

It was closed when we came. It's a shame, as few houses are accessible and most are closed for renovation.

This house is famous for **a fresco of two lovers kissing with modesty**.

#### 6. Casa del menandro (Menander's house) ♥♥♥

This is one of the **largest and most beautiful houses on the site**, and at the far right you can see the remains of a magnificent bathroom.

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## 7. Casa degli amanti (Pompeii's house of lovers) ♥♥♥

This house is a must-see, as it's also **the only two-storey house on the site**. If it is not open to the public at the time of your stay.

Don't hesitate to add **Herculaneum to your itinerary**, as a number of two-storey houses on this site have been found almost intact.

## 8. Teatro piccolo (Little theater) ♥

We're starting to see a lot of tourist groups, whereas up until now we'd been few and far between in the almost empty streets of Pompeii. Again, we advise you to

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get there as soon as possible.

It's a **small**, extremely well-preserved **theater** for up to 1,000 spectators, where musical and mime performances were held.

## 9. Teatro grande (Pompeii's great theater) ♥♥♥

As its name suggests, it was the **city's large theater**. What is interesting is that the seat numbers are still marked on some of the bleachers. Almost 2000 years later, it's crazy!

## 10. Lupanare (Pompeii's famous brothel) ♥♥

One of the **brothels** of Pompeii, necessarily hidden in a small alley. The walls feature numerous frescoes of a sexual nature.

We learned it by listening to a guide present on the spot with his group, at the time many merchants crossed Pompeii to convey or sell their goods. Since there was no common language, the paintings helped the customers to understand each other. Note also that the street seems to have been used a lot, considering the wheel marks in the road...

We managed to glean some information by "**quietly**" **joining** groups from time to time. On our next visit, we'll take a guide to learn more about life in Roman times.

## 11. Foro ♥♥

This **long rectangular square of 142 m x 38 m was the political and religious heart of the city**. You will find there the most famous temples like the one of Jupiter and Apollo as well as the great economic and political institutions.

You will quickly understand that the forum was the gathering place of the city. It also offers a beautiful view of Vesuvius.

Its ground was covered with marble, we learned, always thanks to our fine ear, that the plunderers rushed to recover the precious materials (like the marble) at the time of the first excavations...

## 12. Bonus: The Villa of Mysteries

Pompeii's Villa des Mystères is a sumptuous Roman residence on the outskirts of the ancient city, renowned for its exceptionally well-preserved frescoes. These murals, which decorate a room dedicated to initiation rites for the cult of Dionysus, offer a fascinating insight into the religious and cultural life of the Roman era.

→ Access with **Pompeii Plus** ticket

## Practical tips for visiting Pompeii

### Where to park?

Pompeii offers several parking options, but they can fill up quickly in high season:

- [Free parking](#): 15-minute walk from the site (unsecured, ideal for tight budgets).
- **Pay parking** : Close to the main entrances, convenient but often full during peak periods.

→ **Tip:** Arrive early in the morning to find a place easily and avoid the heat of the day.

## How long does it take to visit Pompeii in Italy?

This is always a complicated question to answer. The ideal duration depends on your wishes and the time you have available:

- **Express tour (2 to 3 hours):** Ideal for visitors in a hurry or those wishing to concentrate on the highlights (forum, amphitheatre, thermal baths).
- **Full tour (5 to 6 hours):** Recommended for exploring in detail the iconic houses, temples and streets.
- **In-depth tour (1 day or more):** For history buffs or those who want to discover every nook and cranny, including lesser-visited areas.

→ **Tip:** If you only have a few hours, plan your itinerary in advance (see our detailed guide) to maximize your time on site.

For our part, after 5 hours we had seen enough and we were getting saturated. To

help you get the most out of your time, we've put together a detailed itinerary of our must-sees.

## What are the best times to visit the site?

We recommend **visit Pompeii as soon as it opens** , to enjoy the site without too many visitors. From mid-morning onwards, the buses pour in hordes of tourists. Another tip from Pourquoi Pas Nous: most guided tours finish around 12pm, so it'll be a little less crowded after that.

Timetables for discovering Pompeii are divided into two periods, since in Italy, from the changeover to winter time, the sun sets at around 4:30 pm and it's pitch-dark by 5 pm.

- From April 1 to October 31: 9am - 7pm (last entry 5pm)
- From November 1st to March 31st: 9am - 5pm (last entry 3:30pm)

Pompeii is open every day except December 25, May 1 and January 1. Find all the updated information on the [official website](#).

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## Preparing your visit to the archaeological site

### Update your knowledge

Pompeii is an **exceptional archaeological site**, dating from the Roman era, registered as a **UNESCO** World Heritage Site, located about 25 kilometers from Naples.

It's a site that's accessible to everyone, even though we're by no means experts in history, and we learned a great deal during our visit to the ruins of Pompeii. If you have time beforehand, we recommend you watch the documentary "[C'est pas sorcier Pompei](#)", as always **very comprehensive and easy to understand**, thanks Jamie ☐ As well as this short video explaining the [organization of a Roman domus \(house\)](#). It's a quick and easy way to get to grips with the history of this Roman city.

### Prepare your itinerary

If you'd like to visit Pompeii on your own, [see our detailed itinerary below](#).

## Essential equipment for a pleasant visit

You will realize it once on the spot, the site is immense, you will make several kilometers in order to go to the various points of interest.

Pompeii is a huge site, with cobbled streets and little shade. Here are our recommendations:

- **Comfortable footwear:** Choose sneakers or walking shoes suitable for uneven terrain.
- **Sun protection:** Hats, sun cream, sunglasses and light clothing are essential, especially in summer.
- **Water and snacks:** Bring plenty of water, as on-site fountains don't always work. A small snack can be useful to avoid long breaks.
- **Small backpacks:** Only small backpacks are allowed on site.
- **Guide or mobile app:** Download an interactive map or audio guide to better understand the places you visit.

→ **Tip:** Consult the [official Pompeii guide](#) before your visit to ensure you're fully informed.

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- [Pompei Plus admission ticket with audio guide](#)
- [Guided tour with an archaeologist \(in French\)](#)
- 1-day [combined ticket \(Vesuvius + Pompeii\)](#) from Naples

That's it, you're ready to enjoy.

## The fascinating history of Pompeii

### From ancient origins to Roman greatness

Long before it became one of the world's most famous archaeological sites, **Pompeii** was a modest **Oscan** city founded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. Greek and Etruscan influences gradually shaped its architecture and customs. Situated on a fertile lava plateau at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, the town enjoys an ideal position between sea and mountains, protected by the Sarno River. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, it came under **Samnite** control, before being incorporated into the Roman orbit following the social wars.

Pompeii became a Roman colony under Sylla, and was renamed *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum*. At this time, the city was at its most prosperous: splendid **patrician villas**, **public baths**, an **amphitheatre**, a **monumental forum** and countless **shops** bear witness to its flourishing prosperity. Its population is

estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000. The walls of the houses are covered with colorful frescoes, the floors are adorned with mosaics, and the streets vibrate to the rhythm of the markets, the baths and the rumors of the forum.

But the city also experienced its first trials: a violent **earthquake in 62 AD** destroyed part of the city. The inhabitants then undertook major reconstruction work. In 59, a **bloody riot** broke out in the amphitheatre between the inhabitants of Pompeii and Nocera; Tacitus wrote about it in his *Annals*. All signs of a bustling city, both powerful and vulnerable.

## **The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD: a tragedy frozen in time**

On **October 24, 79 AD**, according to new analyses, **Vesuvius** suddenly erupted. Early in the day, a column of ash rose to an altitude of over 30 km; pumice began to fall on the city, burying roofs. Residents tried to flee, but panic set in. A few hours later, a series of **fiery clouds** swept down the mountain at over 100 km/h, scorching everything in their path. In less than 24 hours, Pompeii disappeared under more than six metres of ash and volcanic pumice.

Excavations have identified the exact positions of many of the victims: some sought refuge in cellars, others tried to reach the sea. **Plaster casts** made from the cavities left by the bodies show these frozen moments – human silhouettes captured in their last gestures. These deeply moving impressions are a reminder that behind the beauty of the site lies a profoundly human tragedy.

Historians have long dated the disaster to August 24, but recent discoveries, such as a charcoal inscription bearing the date October or the presence of **autumn fruit** in some houses, confirm that it took place later in the year. Whatever the exact date, this day will forever mark the history of the Mediterranean.

## From rediscovery to major archaeological digs

After the catastrophe, memories of Pompeii gradually faded. In the <sup>16th</sup> century, workmen digging a canal accidentally rediscovered some ancient walls. But it wasn't until **1748** that the first serious excavations began under the reign of **Charles III de Bourbon**. Houses, frescoes and everyday objects were unearthed, and the whole of Europe marveled at this "rediscovered world".

In the <sup>19th</sup> century, archaeologist **Giuseppe Fiorelli** introduced a revolutionary method. He divided the city into **regions (*regiones*) and islets (*insulae*)**, numbered each house and invented the technique of plaster casts, giving a face to the victims of the eruption. These actions, both scientific and profoundly human, made Pompeii a unique site in the world.

Since then, the search has never ceased. New areas continue to be uncovered: **the Regio V**, for example, has revealed strikingly realistic frescoes, superbly preserved thermopoliums and even humorous graffiti. In 1997, Pompeii became a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**. More recently, the **Great Pompeii Project** has restored dozens of dwellings, secured fragile structures and modernized public presentation. It's a colossal undertaking that is restoring the ancient city to its former glory.

Today, Pompeii is much more than a site frozen in time: it's a **living archaeological laboratory**, where 3D technologies, photogrammetry and paleobotanical studies are helping us to better understand the daily life of the Romans. With each excavation campaign, new discoveries emerge: frescoes, inscriptions, objects, sometimes even the remains of domestic animals. Each find adds a new page to the history of a city eternally suspended in ashes.

## Where to stay in Pompeii to be the first on site?

As mentioned above, we advise you to arrive as soon as the site opens, to avoid the crowds of tourists. The ideal is therefore, in our opinion, to sleep near the site.

**Hotels are reasonably priced**, and most are located close to the archaeological site.

→ We stayed at [Il Vecchio Fauno](#), a 5-minute walk from the ruins, the town center and the train station. Our room was spacious, clean and well decorated, with the added bonus of paintings on display in the hotel's common areas. The breakfast is very good, homemade cake, blinis, eggs, ham, fruit etc...

The hosts are lovely and will gladly answer all your questions, which is always great! If you're coming by car, **parking is free**, which saves you ten euros or so and a lot of stress! In short, excellent value for **money**!

[Book this hotel in Pompeii](#)

Looking for a place to stay in Naples? To make it easier for you to find what you're looking for, we've put together an article detailing **the most interesting areas to stay in Naples** and **those to avoid**, as well as our **best hotel addresses**.

## Where to eat good home-made food?

At **Todisco**, a stone's throw from the ruins, for once we followed the advice of the **Routard guide**, as the Google reviews were also very good, so we weren't disappointed.

We ate **delicious gnocchi and excellent vegetarian lasagna for a small price** and enjoyed the pleasant terrace. We even got takeout for our evening meal. We really recommend it!

## How to get to Pompeii?

Pompeii, around 25 km from Naples, is easily accessible from many of Italy's major cities. Whether you're traveling by train, car or organized tour, here are all the options for getting to this iconic site from Naples, Sorrento, Herculaneum, or even

Rome.

## Getting to Pompeii from Naples

Naples is the closest city to Pompeii and offers several convenient means of transport:

Means of transport	Estimated duration	Average price	Details
<b>Circumvesuviana train</b>	35-45 min	3,60 €	Departure from Napoli Centrale station. Stop at "Pompei Scavi - Villa dei Misteri".
<a href="#">Car</a>	30-40 min	~10 € parking + rental and fuel	Take the A3 freeway towards Salerno. <a href="#">Reserve a bus seat in advance.</a>
<b>By shuttle</b>	40-50 min	22 € round trip	The bus stop is located at the City Sightseeing Naples terminal.
<b>Organized excursion</b>	Full day	Variable	Transport, guided tours and guided tours.

→ **Tip:** The **Circumvesuviana** train is the fastest and cheapest way to avoid traffic jams and parking costs.

## Car rental from Naples

□ To compare offers and find the best value for money, after testing several today, we're using the reliable and easy-to-use [Discover Cars](#) price comparator for car hire.

□ To give you an idea of the rate, we found a car for €35 per day through Galdieri Rent to pick up at Naples airport.

**For insurance:** We recommend you take the [DiscoverCars full coverage](#) (about €8 per day). may seem to represent an additional cost at the time of booking (it's sometimes higher than the rental price), but above all it's a way of traveling with peace of mind. A simple impact on the windscreen or a minor fender-bender

(Neapolitan driving is very sporty) can quickly become costly, and this kind of detail can ruin a trip.

□ [Compare Naples airport deals on Discover Cars](#)

## Getting there from Sorrento

Sorrento, on the Amalfi coast, is also well connected to Pompeii:

Means of transport	Estimated duration	Average price	Details
<b>Circumvesuviana train</b>	30-35 min	~2,80 €	Depart Sorrento station. Get off at "Pompei Scavi - Villa dei Misteri".
<a href="#">Car</a>	35-45 min	~10 € parking	Take the SS145 towards Pompeii.

→ **Tip:** Take the train for a fast, scenic ride along the coast.

## Getting to Pompeii from Herculaneum

Herculaneum, another ancient city preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, is just a few kilometers from Pompeii :

Means of transport	Duration	Average price	Details
<b>Circumvesuviana train</b>	10-15 min	~2 €	Departure from Herculaneum station. Get off at “Pompei Scavi - Villa dei Misteri”.
<a href="#">Car</a>	20-30 min	~10 € parking	Take the SS18 or A3 freeway towards Pompeii.

## It's possible to visit Pompeii from Rome

It is the second most visited site in Italy after the Colosseum in Rome. Some travelers, therefore, wish to discover this incredible site during their stay in Rome.

However, there is **no direct connection** between Rome and Pompeii. You'll need to take the train from the main “Roma-Termini” station and change trains in Naples.

By car, **allow 2h30 for** a somewhat tiring journey, then you can park close to the site in a paid or free parking lot (see our map below).

Means of transport	Duration	Average price	Details
<b>High-speed train (Frecciarossa)</b>	1h10 (Rome-Naples) + 45 min (Naples-Pompei)	~50-70 € round trip	Take the fast train to Naples, then the Circumvesuviana to Pompeii.
<b>Car</b>	~2h30	~30 € fuel + tolls	Take the A1 freeway, then the A3 towards Pompeii.
<b>Organized excursion</b>	Full day	Variable	Includes round-trip transportation, tickets and guide.

→ In this case, all-inclusive excursions are ideal if you want to avoid the hassle of organizing transport and maximize your time on site.

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## What to do around Pompeii?

**The area around Naples is full of sites to explore.** You will certainly have to come back several times to have time to enjoy each site.

### Naples and its islands

Of course, we recommend a [visit to Naples](#), a city with a typically Mediterranean atmosphere that's sure to take your breath away. Many of the objects and frescoes found at Pompeii are on display at the [National Archaeological Museum in Naples](#).

Its islands, including [Capri](#), just 30 minutes away by boat, offer a beautiful natural interlude during your stay.

### Discover Herculaneum

As you'll no doubt have gathered by now, we loved [Herculaneum](#). **In our opinion, it's a must-see, on a par with Pompeii, and the ruins there are even better preserved** Yes, it's possible.

## **Climb to the summit of Vesuvius**

Of course, it's also a must-see, so we advise you to prepare well for your [ascent of Vesuvius](#), and explain the mistakes to avoid.

## **Enjoy the Amalfi Coast**

For our part, we haven't explored it yet, which is why we're bound to return to Naples one day. In order to reach the famous Amalfi Coast, you must take the "Circumvesuviana" train to Sorrento (30 minutes) and then take a SITA bus to one of the towns along the coast.

**Pompeii is one of the most surprising places we've ever explored.** Even though we were exhausted from the day, we are grateful to have been able to walk the grounds of this city and to have learned so much about ancient history.

We thank you for reading all the way through, we hope we have answered all your questions. Do not hesitate to leave us a note below to tell us if you are planning this trip, or to ask any questions you may have, we will answer you with great pleasure! If you liked this article, feel free to drop 5 stars below.

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4 avis (5/5)

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