



## MAIORI CITY TOUR

*1 hour tour of the city with the volunteers of Make it Blue*

### Welcome to the Maiori City Tour

Hello everyone, and welcome to the Maiori City Tour organised by the volunteers of the Make it Blue project. This initiative is carried out by young international volunteers who are here in Maiori during the summer to offer their help to the Maiori community. In this project, we carry out beach cleaning activities, raise awareness about environmental protection, collaborate with the local order of nuns in activities for children, and also work to discover and promote the historical and cultural heritage of Maiori. As you can understand, we are not professional guides but volunteers who, through this activity, get to know the local culture. So, this City Tour we are starting together is a journey of discovery for both you and us, and we hope you will enjoy it. Let's begin!

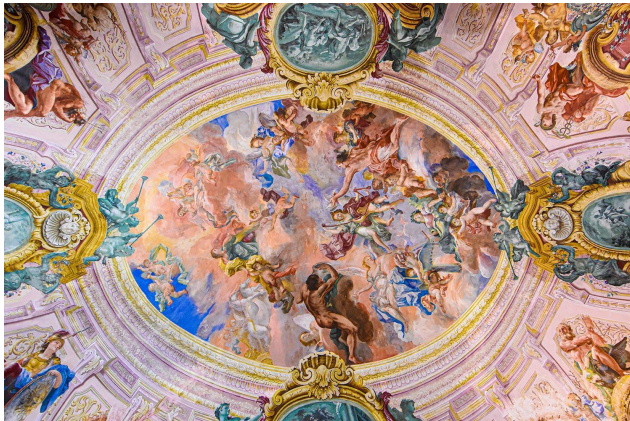
### Palazzo Mezzacapo - Maiori's Town Hall



Our walk begins at the magnificent Palazzo Mezzacapo. This historic building, originally part of a larger estate owned by Giacomo Lanario in the 1500s, was later transferred to the noble Mezzacapo family. The exact construction date is unclear, but from the 1700s to the early 1800s, the palace was beautifully renovated, into the building we see today. Today, it hosts the municipal library and the historical archive of Maiori. Imagine living like the Mezzacapo marquises, walking

through the neoclassical halls of this residence, including Filippo Mezzacapo, the first in the family to become a Knight of Malta. The palace has many classical elements inspired by Greek and Roman architecture, harmoniously blending with Renaissance details. The grand entrance welcomes us with a finely carved wooden door, leading the way to two magnificent marble staircases that ascend to the upper floors. Imagine going up these steps, feeling the history of this place beneath your feet.

## Inside Palazzo Mezzacapo - the Frescoes of the council meeting room



Continuing our journey inside Palazzo Mezzacapo, we reach the most important room: this is the 'Salone del Consiglio Comunale' which is where the local councillors meet. Look up and let yourself be mesmerised by the magnificent vaulted ceiling adorned with frescoes, a masterpiece that dates back to the late 1700s.

The frescoes celebrate the marriage between Gaetano Mezzacapo and a noblewoman from Bologna, Marianna

Pepoli. In the middle of the scene, there is Apollo commanding the goddess of dawn, Aurora, to make the sun rise. The coming of a new day symbolises hope and bestows luck upon the bride and groom in their new life together. In this scene we also see the newlyweds united by a cord with the gods gathered around them. Here we can see Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, and Mercury, along with the four seasons, creating a picture of extraordinary harmony. Look closely and you will also notice references to the Amalfi Coast, such as the Reginna River and the sirens. Furthermore, the fresco depicts stories with unhappy endings, which contrast with the joy of the marriage, highlighting the happiness of the newlyweds even more.

## Casale dei Cicerali



Our journey continues through the historic alleys of Maiori, where every street tells stories of a distant era. Walking through these ancient streets, we immerse ourselves in the charm of times gone by.

Now we reach the Casale dei Cicerali, named for the commercial activities that once animated its inhabitants. Along with Via Lazzaro, it represents one of the oldest neighborhoods in the center of Maiori. Here, hidden among the narrow streets, we can find a characteristic wooden crucifix crafted from chestnut

dating back to the 17th century. It features an oil-painted image of Christ, bearing witness to the deep devotion of the community.

In the past, this neighborhood also hosted a synagogue, now replaced by the chapel of the Addolorata. On a nearby wall, a plaque memorializes the ancient Jewish settlement that once thrived in this area. It's amazing to think how history has shaped every corner of this neighborhood. However, the current appearance of the Casale dei Cicerali also bears the scars of a dramatic event: the flood of October 1954, which completely destroyed the area, forever changing the face of Maiori.

## Cappella Madonna Addolorata (Jewish Synagogue)



During the medieval period, Jews were often marginalized and forced to disperse throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. One of the places where they found refuge was the Duchy of Amalfi. Historical documents tell us about a vibrant Jewish community in Maiori, where many practiced garment dyeing, some were doctors, but the most characteristic activity was banking. Jewish money-lenders financed the voyages of ships from the Maritime Republic of Amalfi

and facilitated international trade.

The four Italian maritime republics - Venice, Genoa, Pisa, and Amalfi - achieved considerable economic and naval power through maritime trade during the Middle Ages. While Venice is probably the most well known, Amalfi is historically the first maritime republic, founded in the 9th century. Each maritime republic had its own fleet and controlled commercial routes in the Mediterranean, maintaining significant political and administrative autonomy. These city-states often competed with each other for control over trade and maritime routes.

Returning to the Jewish presence in the Duchy of Amalfi, in the mid-1200s, a small synagogue was founded in Maiori, a tangible sign of the importance of this community mentioned in numerous historical documents. This synagogue was located near the current entrance of the Church of Madonna Addolorata and would have served as a central place in the life of the Jewish community at that time.

Now, let's continue our walking tour to discover another important symbol of Maiori: the Collegiata Church of Santa Maria a Mare.

## Collegiata di Santa Maria a Mare - 'The Church of Saint Mary of the Sea'



Here we are at Maiori's main church, the **Collegiata Church of Santa Maria a Mare**. Built in the 13th century by the Lombards, the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria a Mare stands on the ruins of Rocca S. Angelo, one of the fortifications defending the Amalfi Republic, it was destroyed by soldiers from the Republic of Pisa in 1100 during one of the many wars between maritime republics. Although the church has undergone numerous modifications and expansions over time, it retains a fascinating 18th-century style.

The bell tower, dating back to the 14th century, and the splendid dome adorned with Vietri ceramics, completed in 1863, are among the most characteristic architectural elements. Inside, the ceiling is adorned with richly decorated 'coffers' - the recessed panels on the ceiling. The church houses precious sacred objects and paintings dating back to the 15th century. Another element of great interest is the organ, located near the main entrance, built at the beginning of the 1900s commissioned by the Municipal Council.

We cannot forget the crypt, which hosts a museum of sacred art, a true hidden treasure that tells the religious and artistic history of our community.

On the terrace at the main entrance, we can admire Maiori's terraced landscape, with its dry stone walls primarily used for lemon cultivation. This landscape has been shaped over more than a thousand years of history. On this hill once stood a defensive watchtower of the Republic of Amalfi, which would send signals (using smoke in the day or fire at night) to warn of potential attacks. One of the structures that would be looking out for these signals was the Castle of Thoro Plano, visible to the north.

## Castello de Thoro Plano



Also known as the **Castle of San Nicola de Thoro Plano**, it is an imposing structure dating back to the 9th century that rises majestically over the city. The history of this fascinating place begins with an old church dedicated to Saint Nicholas, from which the castle takes its name. Used as a communication point by the Republic of Amalfi,

the castle underwent a complete transformation in 1465 when the Piccolomini family took possession of the lands along the river Reginna Major.

The Piccolomini expanded the castle, reinforced its walls, and added towers, transforming it into the fortress that we admire today. This strong structure served as a defensive bastion until the early 19th century, after which it was used by the residents of Maiori to store their agricultural produce.

## The Steps of the Colleggiata

Let's continue our walk down the steps that lead towards Corso Reginna. These steps are famous because they mark the starting and ending point of the traditional popular festival on August 15th, in honor of Santa Maria a Mare, the Madonna Assunta, whose statue is carried in procession throughout the town. At the end of the procession, the most devout believers carry the statue on their shoulders and begin a furious race down the 127 steps of Corso Reginna, like a human wave carrying the Madonna towards the Collegiate Church. It's a unique spectacle.

Now, let's take these steps to head towards the old city walls.

## Maiori's History and Ancient Walls



We are now in the characteristic alley of Via Casa Mannini. The origins of Maiori date back to Roman times and the Etruscans. According to the writer Pliny, Maiori is named after the goddess Maia.

Some historians claim that Maiori was initially founded under the name Reginna Major, derived from the river that flows through it. Traces of Etruscan and Roman cultures are still

visible, as evidenced by the Roman Villa in Minori, an important archaeological site highlighting the Roman presence in the region.

During the Middle Ages, Maiori became an integral part of the Duchy of Amalfi, a powerful maritime state. Each town along the coast had a specific role: Amalfi was the capital and administrative centre, while Maiori hosted the customs office, numerous arsenals, and naval bases.

During a period of intense conflict, Maiori constructed a majestic fortification called S. Sebastiano near the beach, featuring three gates and a large moat. In this alley, we can see the remains of those ancient fortifications.

A second line of defense included three main towers, among them Thoro Plano and Rocca S. Angelo, where the Collegiata Church now stands. It's from here that we got the term "Tramontana", referring to the cold wind that comes from the north, from the valley of the nearby municipality of Tramonti. For centuries, the Amalfitans painted this name on the Compass Rose, as they are attributed with the invention of the compass.

The arsenals of Maiori continued their activities even after the fall of the Republic of Amalfi, constructing ships for the Kingdom of Naples. However, during the invasions by the Saracens, Normans, and Pisans, Amalfi and the other cities along the coast, once splendid and rich with ornate palaces, began to transform into modest villages with an economy based on agriculture, fishing, and craftsmanship.

With the decline of maritime trade, Maiori developed along the Reginna River valley, where numerous paper mills flourished, marking a new chapter in the economic history of our town.

Now let's continue walking towards Palazzo Mezzacapo, crossing the Corso. Here the Reginna River flows beneath our feet. It was paved over to create our main street and thoroughfare 'Corso Reginna'. It is this very river that the residents of Maiori also remember for a catastrophic event.

## The Flooding of the 'Reginna'



During the night between October 25th and 26th, 1954, a terrible flood ravaged the Campania region, extending from the Amalfi Coast to the city of Salerno, including Maiori. The rain began in the afternoon of October 25th and continued incessantly until 5 o'clock the following morning.

The consequences were devastating. Although the exact number of casualties is not known, historical records officially document 316 deaths, with 34 of them from Maiori. However this number is considered inaccurate because many bodies were swept out to sea and others could not be identified.

The flood not only caused numerous deaths and injuries but also brought with it tremendous architectural destruction. Maiori saw many of its buildings and neighborhoods collapse, including some of the oldest and historically beautiful ones, as well as more recent constructions. The swift and muddy waters mercilessly destroyed these structures, erasing centuries of history and culture in just moments.

We're now arriving at the final landmark of our tour, the beautiful Mezzacapo Gardens.

## Gardens of Palazzo Mezzacapo



These gardens are shaped like the Maltese cross, in honor of the 'Hospitaller order' (a late medieval religious society of knights) to which many members of the noble Mezzacapo family belonged. The central path divides the gardens into four sections. Water from the nearby Reginna river was used as a driving force for the mill built on the eastern side of the garden and also to power the irrigation system of the large lemon grove that existed behind the building and has recently been replanted with

lemon trees. The garden boasts artificial grottos and impressive fountains. Walking through the garden, visitors can also take in a variety of Mediterranean plants, flowers and trees which offer welcome shade, providing a relaxing retreat in the heart of Maiori. It often hosts

art exhibitions, cultural events, and musical performances, bringing vibrancy to the summer evenings of the city.

With this, our tour comes to an end. Thank you for your attention, and we hope we have helped you discover something unique and different, which we too are learning more about every day in our volunteer experience here on the Amalfi Coast. If you'd like to follow our activities, you can follow the social media profiles of the local association ACARBIO, which organized this project and aims to promote sustainable development of the Amalfi Coast and preserve its unique landscape.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/acarbio/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acarbio.onlus>

website: [www.acarbio.org](http://www.acarbio.org)