BAREFOOT IN CILENTO

WHERE YOGA, SLOW LIVING AND THE SOUL OF SOUTHERN ITALY MEET

by **Claudia Scotellaro** | Images provided by **ViviLocal**

ViviLocal's Cilento Yoga Retreat blends slow travel, yoga, local food, artisanship and visual storytelling, inviting travellers to deeply experience Southern Italy through presence, connection and the spirit of place.



ViviLocal group in Maratea

There is a version of Italy that does not make the highlight reels. No Colosseum, no canals, no queues. It's an Italy of terraced hills that rise above an impossibly blue sea, of villages where time moves like honey, and of people who still make things with their hands, and tell stories worth carrying home.

ViviLocal is an Australian-based travel company built on a simple but radical premise: that the best way to experience Italy is not merely to see it, but to live it. The company creates immersive experiences that go far beyond the itinerary, curating encounters with local artisans, cheesemakers, storytellers, and landscapes that most visitors never reach. The Cilento Yoga Retreat was, in many ways, the fullest expression of that philosophy yet.

If you haven't been, Cilento is a national park in the southern Campania region—a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the birthplaces of the Mediterranean diet. It is rugged, generous, and largely untouched by urgency. For five days in late May, a

small group gathered there not to tick off sights, but to exhale.

The retreat began as it meant to continue: with a welcome dinner, local wine, and a *Mozzarella Lab*—a hands-on initiation into one of southern Italy's most sacred foods. In this part of the world, food is never only fuel for the body. It is culture, connection, ceremony.

Each morning began with yoga—a quiet anchor before the day opened up to sightseeing and mingling with the locals. An hour of breath and movement that created a particular quality of attention, one that coloured everything that came after.

But perhaps the most unexpected thread running through the week was something quieter: a visual and narrative practice called *Sguardo, Parola, Luogo* (Gaze, Word, Place). On the first day, the group met with Jepis, a local storyteller and cultural guide, for a workshop that turned out to be more of an art opening. Each participant chose a photographic theme to carry through the retreat: Water, Light, Roots, Threshold, Breath. From that moment on, every experience became part of an unfolding story.

The practice was simple. One photograph each day. One accompanying word or short phrase. Nothing elaborate or polished—just intention. Shared quietly in a group chat each evening, the images gradually became something unexpectedly moving: a collective portrait of the Cilento, built from entirely different



***Capelli di Venere* waterfall, Cilento**



gazes, moods, and moments.

We weren't visiting Cilento. We were meeting it. And, in some quieter way, meeting parts of ourselves too.

And there was so much to meet. A boat trip along the coast to Maratea, a seaside town crowned by its towering *Cristo Redentore*, where lunch at the port meant eating with the salt still drying on sun-warmed skin. There was a morning spent in the ceramics workshop of a local artisan, Mastro Domenico, whose devotion to his craft was inseparable from the ceramics themselves. Hands met clay and something instinctive took over.

The group visited hilltop villages where lunch arrived the way it always has in these parts: generously and without ceremony. We meditated outdoors as the evening light softened over the hills; and visited the *Cascate dei Capelli di Venere* (Venus Hair Waterfalls)—named for the delicate maidenhair ferns that veil the water—one of the most magical corners of the entire park. And in Sapri, evenings unfolded slowly: once over a *degustazione* (tasting) of gourmet gelato, on another over a long celebratory dinner of traditional Cilento cuisine.

On the final evening, the photographic journey came full circle. Participants shared their week's collection of images, words, the chosen themes, and the room became something between an exhibition and a conversation. The ancient Romans called it *genius loci*: the spirit of a place. Cilento has it in abundance.

Yoga and meditation were not decorative additions bolted onto a travel programme; they were the operating system. The morning practice sharpened the senses in a way that made everything richer—the way you listened when an artisan explained his craft, noticed light falling through a doorway, or how the water felt at the falls. And the visual journey extended that attention further still into the landscape, villages, and the textures and thresholds of a place that rewards slowness.

What ViviLocal understands is that travel should not be measured by how much you see, but by how deeply you experience what is in front of you. Cilento, with its ancient rhythms and extraordinary generosity, is the ideal setting for that kind of journey.

The group left on Friday morning with bags heavier from ceramics and bottles of local olive oil, and hearts lighter from something harder to name. The kind of reset that a week in southern Italy knows how to give you. The kind that stays with you long after you return home.