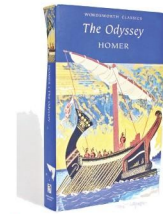


The Odyssey by Homer: The epic that inspired a coastline



First composed nearly 3,000 years ago, The Odyssey follows the legendary hero Odysseus on his long and perilous journey home after the Trojan War. Its tales of the enchantress Circe, the Cyclops, the Sirens and other mythical adventures have inspired generations of writers, artists and travellers. Along Italy's Riviera of Ulysses, many of these legendary episodes are believed to have unfolded, keeping Homer's timeless epic alive in the region's landscapes and local folklore

Tucked between Rome and Naples lies one of Italy's most overlooked coastal treasures—the Riviera di Ulisse (Riviera of Ulysses). Stretching roughly 70km along the Tyrrhenian Sea, this beautiful coastline offers dramatic cliffs, pristine beaches, Roman ruins and charming seaside towns. Unlike the crowded Amalfi Coast or Cinque Terre, it remains peaceful and authentic. What makes it even more fascinating is its deep connection to Homer's The Odyssey, a link that has shaped local identity for centuries.

The journey begins in Terracina, where the skyline is dominated by Monte Circeo, a mountain that appears to rise straight from the sea. Locals affectionately call it La Miga Circe (Circe the Sorceress) because they believe this is where the enchantress Circe transformed Odysseus's sailors into pigs, one of the most memorable episodes in The Odyssey. The mountain watches over the coast, glowing differently at every sunset and serving as a constant reminder of the ancient legend.

Where Myth Meets Geography

Although The Odyssey is deeply rooted in Greek culture, several of its best-known episodes have long been associated with southern Italy. Ancient Greek sailors who settled along the Italian coast around 750 BC carried Homer's stories with them. According to archaeologist Lorenza Cerullo, these sailors connected unfamiliar landscapes to the myths they already knew, making dangerous new territories feel more familiar.

This is how Monte Circeo came to be identified with Aeaëa, Circe's mythical island, while Terracina became associated with the Land of the Laestrygonians, the race of giant cannibals encountered by Odysseus. In ancient times, much of Monte Circeo was surrounded by water, making it appear like an island. It was also home to the Roman harbour settlement of Circeii, further strengthening the connection.

These associations later gained political significance. The Romans embraced Odyssean mythology to create prestigious ancestral links and reinforce the legitimacy of the Roman Empire. The poet Virgil carried these traditions into The Aeneid. Still, Cerullo emphasises that these are literary traditions rather than historical facts.

A Coast Built on Legends

The name Riviera di Ulisse itself is relatively modern, introduced during the 20th century to promote tourism. Generally, it includes the stretch from San Felice Circeo to Scutari, though neighbouring places like Gaeta, Formia and the Pontine Islands also claim ties to Odysseus's journey. Cerullo notes that such competition is common because communities often adopt myths as part of their identity.

Businesses throughout the region carry names inspired by The Odyssey, such as Lido di Penelope and Rive di Ulisse. Yet despite these references, local identity remains rooted in the sea. Residents of Terracina proudly describe themselves as "fish bloods", reflecting generations of fishing traditions that continue alongside modern tourism.

Nature, Archaeology and Ancient Wonders

Visitors today can explore the same landscapes that inspired generations of storytellers.

Parco Nazionale del Circeo, centred around Monte Circeo, protects over 9,000 hectares of forests, dunes and lakes crossed by scenic hiking trails. At its summit stand the remains of a Roman sanctuary dedicated to Circe, overlooking the coastline and the ancient Temple of Jupiter Anxur in Terracina. The park also offers guided tours of Grotta Guattari, famous for the discovery of Neanderthal remains in 1938.

Further south, Parco Regionale Riviera di Ulisse showcases rugged cliffs, sea caves, secluded beaches and spectacular coastal scenery best explored by boat.

Another highlight is Sperlonga, whose connection to The Odyssey emerged in 1957 with the discovery of an extraordinary collection of marble sculptures depicting scenes from the epic inside Emperor Tiberius's seaside villa. Archaeologists later found that the grotto housing these statues had been carefully engineered so sunlight illuminated them during the solstices. The sculptures are now displayed in Sperlonga's National Archaeological Museum, while visitors can also enjoy the town's whitewashed lanes and beautiful beaches.

Italy Without the Crowds

Despite its remarkable combination of mythology, archaeology and natural beauty, the Riviera of Ulysses remains largely overlooked by international tourists.

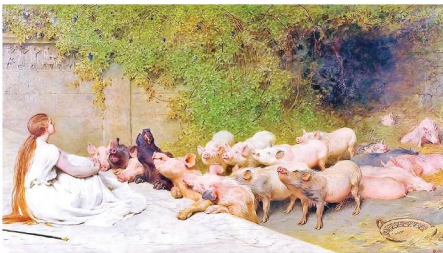
Located between Rome and Naples, the region is often passed by rather than explored. Local tour guide Linda Contreras believes this geographical position has prevented it from becoming a major tourist destination. While summer attracts Italian and northern European



Villa of Tiberius, Sperlonga

Emperor Tiberius' seaside villa became famous after archaeologists uncovered magnificent marble sculptures depicting scenes from The Odyssey, revealing Rome's fascination with Greek mythology

Following Odysseus along Italy's forgotten Riviera



Circe and Odysseus' Men: The legend that shaped a coastline

A painting depicting Circe surrounded by the sailors she transformed into pigs. The tale, told in Book 10 of Homer's The Odyssey, has become inseparable from Monte Circeo and the Riviera of Ulysses, where locals still celebrate the enduring myth



Monte Circeo, Lazio: The mountain of the sorceress

Rising dramatically from the Tyrrhenian sea, Monte Circeo is believed by local tradition to be the legendary island of Aeaëa, where the enchantress Circe lured Odysseus and transformed his sailors into pigs. Today, its rugged cliffs and hiking trails offer breathtaking views over the Riviera of Ulysses

holidaymakers, tourism remains far more relaxed than in Rome or on the Amalfi Coast.

Instead of luxury resorts and overcrowded attractions, visitors find lively fishing ports, family-run hotels, local boutiques, Roman ruins, medieval streets and vibrant piazzas. Summers bring festivals, concerts and beach life, while the quieter months offer pleasant weather, empty beaches and spectacular sunsets. Throughout the year, travellers can enjoy fresh seafood, buffalo mozzarella and the region's aromatic Muscatel wine.

Living with a Legend

For many residents, The Odyssey is more than a story. Massimo Giovannelli, president of the regional park, says locals feel deeply connected to Odysseus and the culture surrounding him. Beach resort owner Marisa Peroni recalls how her late husband captivated their children by telling them Odysseus's adventures every evening.

Their son, Roberto Della Fornace, remembers how his father admired Odysseus's intelligence and adventurous spirit. Together they sailed to the Pontine Islands, fished at dawn and embraced a life of exploration, believing that, like Odysseus, true fulfilment came from discovering what lay beyond the horizon.

The author also reflects on her own relationship with Terracina. She first visited as a child and later

returned intending to stay only one month. Instead, she remained for 14 years, comparing her unexpected journey to Odysseus being blown off course. Initially she saw herself as Penelope, waiting for a love that never returned, before realising she had become the wandering traveller instead.

Myth or Marketing?

Not everyone is equally enchanted by the region's mythical heritage.

Terracina resident Manuela Gallinari dismisses many of the legends as tourism marketing. Growing up, Circe was simply part of the local landscape rather than a source of wonder. Only later did she realise that portions of one of the world's greatest epics were believed to take place in her hometown. The discovery made familiar surroundings feel unexpectedly extraordinary.

Ultimately, whether the stories are historical truth or imaginative storytelling matters less than their enduring influence. As Linda Contreras observes, myths possess a timeless appeal because they can never be fully proven or disproven. Like an unrequited love, they continue to fascinate across generations.

Today, visitors who swim beneath Monte Circeo, explore Roman ruins or wander through ancient seaside towns become part of that continuing



Monte Circeo at Sunset: Italy's mythical horizon

Bathed in the golden glow of sunset, Monte Circeo dominates the Riviera of Ulysses. Whether viewed as a mountain or the profile of the legendary sorceress, it remains the enduring symbol of one of Italy's most enchanting—and least crowded—coastlines



Summit of Monte Circeo: A view worthy of an epic

From the summit of Monte Circeo, visitors can gaze across forests, beaches and the sparkling Mediterranean. The dramatic landscape has inspired myths for nearly 3,000 years and remains one of the Riviera's most spectacular viewpoints



Terracina Beach: Where mythology meets the Mediterranean

The golden shores of Terracina stretch beneath the watchful silhouette of Monte Circeo. Once linked to the mythical Land of the Laestrygonians, the town today is known for its lively beachfront, fresh seafood and ancient Roman heritage

tradition. Long after Homer first imagined Odysseus's voyage, the Riviera of Ulysses remains a place where myth and landscape still feel inseparable.

This version is approximately 950-1,000 words, preserving all the major topics discussed in the original article while making it suitable for a magazine or newspaper feature.