Italian History Expert Reveals the Sibyl's Cave Near Naples Is Nearly 600 Years Older Than Virgil

Chameleon Travel Shop builds its small group Italy tours around Cumae, Baia and the coast west of Naples.


Joseph Walker, Director, Chameleon Travel Shop

POMPANO BEACH, FL, UNITED STATES, September 16, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Chameleon Travel Shop has revealed where its director places the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl in Italy's timeline, and the answer lands almost 600 years before the poem that made the site famous. The boutique company runs historian led small group programs in Italy built for travelers who want to know what they are standing on. Italian history expert Joseph Walker, who leads it, says the corridor cut into the rock at Cumae held the priestess for a stretch of its history, not for the length of it.

Joseph Walker put the dating on record during a recent appearance on the Danielle Oteri's Italy podcast with host Danielle Oteri. Walker is the author of Buried Italy, the voice behind the social media channel Italian History with Joseph and a historian of ancient and medieval Italy who first reached the country as a U.S. Navy sailor. He has served as a consultant on documentary productions that appeared on the BBC, the History Channel and the Discovery Channel.

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>
> *Joseph Walker, Director, Chameleon Travel Shop*

Cumae was the oldest Greek colony in the West, and it sits inside the Phlegraean Fields, the volcanic zone west of Naples that most first time visitors never reach. Pompeii

absorbs the crowds while the archaeological parks a short drive away stay quiet, and that gap is where seeing Italy and understanding it part ways.

Virgil sent Aeneas to the Sibyl at Cumae, and the long tunnel there has carried her name ever since. Walker believes she was inside it, at the far end, though not that it was cut for her.

"I don't necessarily believe that she was in there century after century, because that tunnel itself predates Virgil by almost 600 years," Walker said on the Danielle Oteri's Italy podcast.

The Italian history expert went further on the cutting style, flagging it as speculation based on history rather than settled fact. The Etruscans were in the area when the passage was made, and the work resembles theirs. Greek religious infrastructure then ran the site for centuries, and by the end of the Roman Empire the space had served as storage and as a paleo-Christian burial ground.

That layered reading is how Joseph Walker builds itineraries. Next to Cumae sits Lago di Averno, where the Greeks found an eighth century B.C. cult of death already in place, tied the lake to the River Styx and drew its name from a word for the lack of birds that died in the fumes above the water. Walker described a landscape where "volcanism created mythology, which at times created history."

Walker rediscovered Portus Julius, the submerged harbor Agrippa built for Octavian, as a young sailor chasing talk of a lost city in the Gulf of Pozzuoli. He then ran the first trips to it, twice a week from late spring to early autumn, on a boat that held eight.

Snorkeling operations followed, then dive tours, then glass bottom boats, and the rediscovery launched a new local tourism industry there.
"It all started with me, basically, that whole area in tourism," Walker said. "You know, that's my biggest claim to fame, I think, is I created a cottage tourism industry."

"I like to say the ancient world is like the ocean. We think we know a lot about the ocean, but we've only mapped 25% of the ocean floor," said Danielle Oteri, host of the Danielle Oteri's Italy podcast.

Five programs make up the Buried Italy Series, every one of them in the south, with Etruscan central Italy and the Dolomites covered by separate itineraries. A Buried Italy Series group holds between eight and 15 travelers, a ceiling set by roads that will not take a coach.

Chameleon Travel Shop staffs the Buried Italy Series with its own office and people inside the country. In 11 years it has taken more than 2,000 travelers through Italy and booked over $20 million in that time.

The Italian history expert went back for a master's degree in history after that first dive, and he

lives between Perugia, Italy and Florida. He was taking groups through the tunnels under Naples as soon as San Lorenzo Maggiore opened them, and his debut book, Buried Italy, is out now.

Listeners who register at www.italianhistorywithjoseph.com/oteri receive field notes on seven Italian sites that no amount of money opens without an introduction, plus a chapter cut from Buried Italy.

About Chameleon Travel Shop

Chameleon Travel Shop runs historian led small group programs in Italy and private, tailor made itineraries. Italian history expert Joseph Walker leads it, and the work runs through Greek, Roman, Etruscan and Norman sites, regional food and wine and Italian-American heritage travel, with the Buried Italy Series as its signature. Travel advisors use Chameleon Travel Shop as the Italy specialist they put in front of their best clients.

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