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Monastero Santa Rosa: A Blissful Retreat on the Amalfi Coast

Written by Kelly Phillips Badal · April 21, 2015



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The Amalfi Coast is no stranger to visitors. But those seeking a more secluded getaway should consider [Monastero Santa Rosa](#), a former 17th-century convent turned blissful resort, blessed with five-star service and views of Italy's Tyrrhenian Sea.

When the sisters of Monastero Santa Rosa left in the mid-1800s, they likely never imagined their austere convent would become an intimate resort run by an American. Owner Bianca Sharma spotted the ruins of the nunnery while boating the Mediterranean coastline and purchased the property within days, spending the next ten years completing a painstaking renovation. The resulting hotel and spa, now open for its fourth season, is far from monastic. To wit: The nun's cells were turned into 20 distinctive suites; a cavernous spa fills the sisters' former winery; and a cascade of cantilevered gardens flow into a beautiful infinity pool set 660 feet above the sea. And yet the resort's building retains the look of the original monastery. "I felt very strongly that as a landmark, it should be preserved," says Sharma. "I wanted to keep that sense of how the nuns lived. I wanted a place that reflected the level of care I want to feel as a guest."

Unlike many hoteliers, Sharma didn't come from a hospitality background; instead, her vision for the Monastero came entirely from her own experiences. "Our service is less about the A, B, C's and more about the heart," she says. "People love to feel embraced, they love to be remembered and recognized; they love knowing you've made a connection. I think that's real luxury." The attention to detail is palpable—visitors rave about the personal touches on every website, from TripAdvisor to Traveler, though there's also a steady refrain of "there are no words...".

It all begins with the chiming of the monastery bell, marking the guests' arrival. A drink of home-grown chamomile, lemongrass, and mint is offered, along with a cool towel. Suites are piled with fresh fruit and sweets at turn-down; soft robes, slippers, and extra blankets fill the closets. Room service can be called to places besides the room (the hotel's tough-to-leave sunset terrace, for instance) and at the pool, attendants thoughtfully offer on-the-house snacks in the afternoon. When you take your leave it's with a gift, such as the hotel's signature dried pasta and a simple recipe from the on-site restaurant's chef. It all speaks to Sharma's goal: to create a seamless, relaxing escape where the staff cares for you like family (only better).



Sharma's lengthy conservation of the original monastery and grounds also reflects her strict attention to detail. Much of the Monastero's structure, from the stone exterior to the vaulted ceilings, has been preserved. The decor is a delicate blend of past-meets-present: 17th-century antiques, Italian-sourced furniture, and abstract artwork, much of it hand-picked by Sharma, give each room the feel of a genteel Italian residence.

Step outside, and you'll see that the Monastero's vanished-edge infinity pool offers the kind of breathtaking views Italy should tout in its travel brochures. From this promontory, gaze to the south toward the well-known town of Amalfi itself, or straight down to the village of Conca dei Marini. For another fantastic vista, the cheerful terrace atop the hotel is a favored escape for guests from sunrise to sunset. Retractable canopies keep it comfortable and, as you'd imagine, this bird's-eye view of the panoramic seascape and the resort's gardens is a stunner.

The gardens, designed in the tradition of old Italian villas and estates, boast four levels of flora; more than 5,000 plants flourish throughout the year. "The concept was not necessarily to follow an Italian estate look, but to reflect the typical plants of the Mediterranean coastline as well as the original plantings of the nuns, who made medical tinctures," says Sharma. Each stone-lined garden passage is a singular experience: Some are filled with sun chairs and private cabanas, others with bubbling fountains among the Amalfi coast's famed lemon trees. Twenty percent of the plants are therapeutic or edible, honoring the natural remedies once made by the Santa Rosa nuns. The gardens produce eggplants, artichokes, tomatoes, salad greens, herbs, and more for the restaurant.



And—as if there weren't enough gasp-inducing escapes within the hotel already—its luxe spa is a destination unto itself. Designed within a space once devoted to wine-making and silent meditation is a 750-foot thermal suite available to all guests. Within there's a succession of sequential treatment areas, including vaulted Roman-style baths, a rock sauna, steam room, hydrotherapy pool, whirlpool footbaths, ice fountain—even programmable showers. "I took a chance on creating a spa of this size—conventional wisdom would say we should add more rooms," says Sharma. "But it's been so well received by guests; most come every day of their stay." Step it up with a private treatment (facials, massages, wraps, and more) or book a day at the "spa-within-a-spa," a private suite that includes its own scenic gardens.

After whiling away the hours on these sacred grounds, don't forget to unburden your soul at the large antique wooden confessional in the main hallway before you go. It cheekily invites guests "make a confession"—by way of written feedback for the staff.

First and third image by Tanveer Badal; second image courtesy Monastero Santa Rosa.

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