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This Is the Secret to Enjoying the Amalfi Coast

How to skip the crowds and have a true Amalfi experience

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It turns out they do not rent powder blue Vespas to inexperienced drivers—especially not tourists who want to drive on the white-knuckle roads that cling to the imposing cliffs of the [Amalfi Coast](#). I felt sorry for the crestfallen young blonde standing at the counter. I wanted to advise her not to drive at all—she would only encounter traffic and anxiety—but hers was a movie-star dream of zipping through the vertical landscape with hair flying, chasing the sun through the loose chain of charming villages that exist on the edge of the sea in spite of gravity and time.

But where is the joy in landing at some tricky destination only to rush through it? The allure of Amalfi is the absurd geography of the place—the fact that humans can thrive in this honeycomb of balconies and archways, hairpin roads, stone steps and dizzying drop-offs. The architecture alone demands that travelers stop and admire.

To really see the Amalfi Coast demands an intentional moment away from the slog of traffic and tourists in Amalfi, [Ravello](#), or [Positano](#). All three towns are picturesque, but all three towns are also overstocked with tourists gripping cones of gelato.



Instead, the best thing to do is to find a perch somewhere tranquil and inviting and stay put. I found mine in the *piccolo* village of Conca dei Marini, at [Monastero Santa Rosa](#).

This 17-century Dominican convent-turned-hotel sits at the edge of a high cliff, and its stucco walls reflect the day's colors: the pink dawn, the tawny afternoon, and the lavender dusk. Church bells ring from the

ancient chapel. Their echo and the Mediterranean breeze were the only sounds I heard from my room.

Contemplative nuns spent lifetimes inside these walls in solemn reflection. I enjoyed the same wonderful solitude, only with greater creature comforts, like a bathtub for two with a view, a spa, and an infinity pool that set the blue horizon right at my fingertips.



Infinity pool at Monastero Santa

PHOTO COURTESY ANDREW EVANS

At the hotel's restaurant, **Il Refettorio**, bread baskets came with olive oil pressed from the trees that grew just outside the walls. The pomegranates, cherry tomatoes, lemons, and basil that showed up at dinner were grown in the sloped garden above the medieval church. And for breakfast, I was served the same flaky *sfogliatelle* that used to be baked by the nuns who lived here.

Peering down from the pool one day, I saw the shady gardens around Sophia Loren's old villa, below us, where a wooden yacht bobbed on

the turquoise water. *This* is how movie stars actually enjoy Amalfi, I thought—hushed and unhurried, enveloped in the luxury of simplicity.

This is the secret to the Amalfi Coast. To live like the nuns (even if you are, in fact, a movie star). Sequestered and stress-free, without any props or pastel scooters, you can skip the most obvious towns for a higher, quieter, better view. You can cling to the hills and lie in the sun and be glad, because it is all so beautiful . . . and slow.

Link to story: <http://www.afar.com/magazine/this-is-the-secret-to-enjoying-the-amalfi-coast>