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MAGAZINE

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KINGPIN DID NEXT

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A majestic monastery-turned-hotel, Monastero Santa Rosa, is the best place to take in the Amalfi Coast (p.113)
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CAPRI SUN



A ROAD TRIP ALONG THE PICTURESQUE CAMPANIA COAST IS A VERITABLE FEAST FOR THE EYES - BUT IT'S THE REGION'S CULINARY OFFERINGS THAT TRULY WHET THE APPETITE

Words: Lily Devan

Italy's coastal reaches have been beloved for decades, with Amalfi, Capri and the Sorrentine peninsula leading the way for laidback glamour. Timeless, elegant, historic, picturesque – the epitome of la dolce vita.

Little can be achieved without a certain confidence behind the wheel, or better still, a chauffeur who knows that the wisest time to be on the road is in the light of dawn or under cover of darkness. For ultimate relaxation, start by heading to the Amalfi coast to explore its natural wonders and unwind. Next, ramp things up with some archaeological sightseeing in Pompeii and Herculaneum, using Sorrento as a base. All before hopping over to Capri – shopping to the sounds of the sea, and strolling nowhere in particular... but certainly in style.

While little changes between visits, the landscape and lifestyle never fails to charm. This is a Grand Tour that begs to be rediscovered time and again, and the nature of tourism here has given stalwart hoteliers the opportunity to refine another aspect of the region's allure: luxe exclusivity. Property is at a premium and plots for new development have long since reached capacity. Since options are relatively limited at the highest end, clear leaders have emerged, whether thanks to a choice location, sharp service, aesthetic appeal or all three.

Evolving at a brisker pace, however, is the restaurant scene. Traditionally, gourmet dining was assumed to mean a staid formula of delicious fresh seafood, a fine olive oil and fantastic mozzarella. Not so today. The standard of haute cuisine appreciated by discerning guests in global cities is being rivalled here. Capri and the peninsula boast more two-Michelin-starred restaurants than Rome, and as many as in Milan.

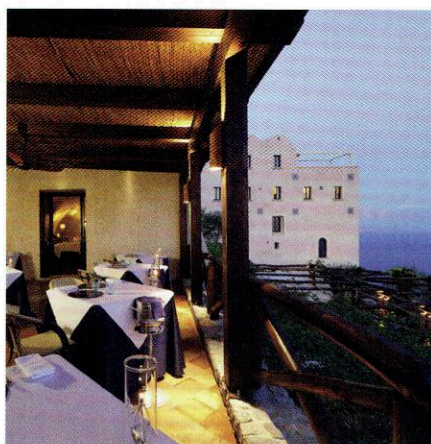
Yes, Campania's coast is an enduring classic. But don't delay – even la dolce vita requires an advance reservation or two.



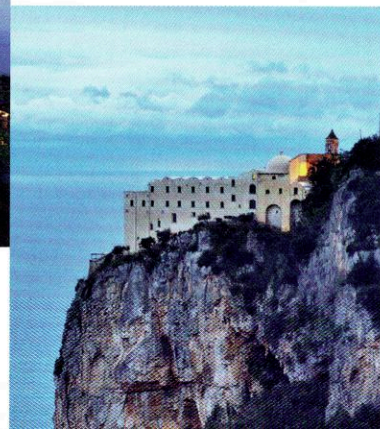
AMALFI COAST

It's the hair-raising, windy roads that lure so many to this 50km UNESCO-protected stretch – with cerulean views and the possibility of a run-in with local motorcyclists or tourist coaches adding to the thrill. Le Sirenuse remains the prime spot for a sojourn in Positano, the postcard perfect town where yellow, pink and orange buildings crowd the cliffside.

Le Sirenuse is a place to see and be seen, and aesthetes will never want to leave. Mediterranean minimalism – with more than a touch of homely Campanian chic – characterises the bedrooms, but it's the public spaces that really present high and (almost) humble glamour. A patio terrace draped in creeping flowers offers an incomparable view over a lazy breakfast or lunch; cushioned bars come into their



own past 10pm; lemon trees and nooks with beautiful mosaic tiling complete the ageless picture at every turn. Even ashtrays exude



THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP POSITANO; LE SIRENUSE; MONASTERO SANTA ROSA; IL REFETTORIO AT MONASTERO SANTA ROSA

ceramic charm, a speciality of both the region and the hotel's own boutique.

For a repast in a dramatic setting, try Il Refettorio at Monastero Santa Rosa, a hotel restaurant half an hour eastwards in Amalfi proper. It gained its first Michelin star in November, aided by a superb seasonal kitchen garden that shines through in mammoth salads and fresh fruit platters. Choose a seat on the indoor-outdoor terrace – this 17th-century monastery is set right on the cliff face.

From £266 per night, sirenuse.it; monasterosantarosa.com



SORRENTO

As a gateway to Capri, Naples, the coast and the ancient histories of Mount Vesuvius, Pompeii and Herculaneum, Sorrento often serves simply as a stopping point – making a reliable place to rest all the more important. Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria plays its role supremely well: an overwhelming breakfast buffet starts in the wee hours; service is prompt and unobtrusive; weary feet need only find their way to the pool – or smart poolside bar – for sweet relief.

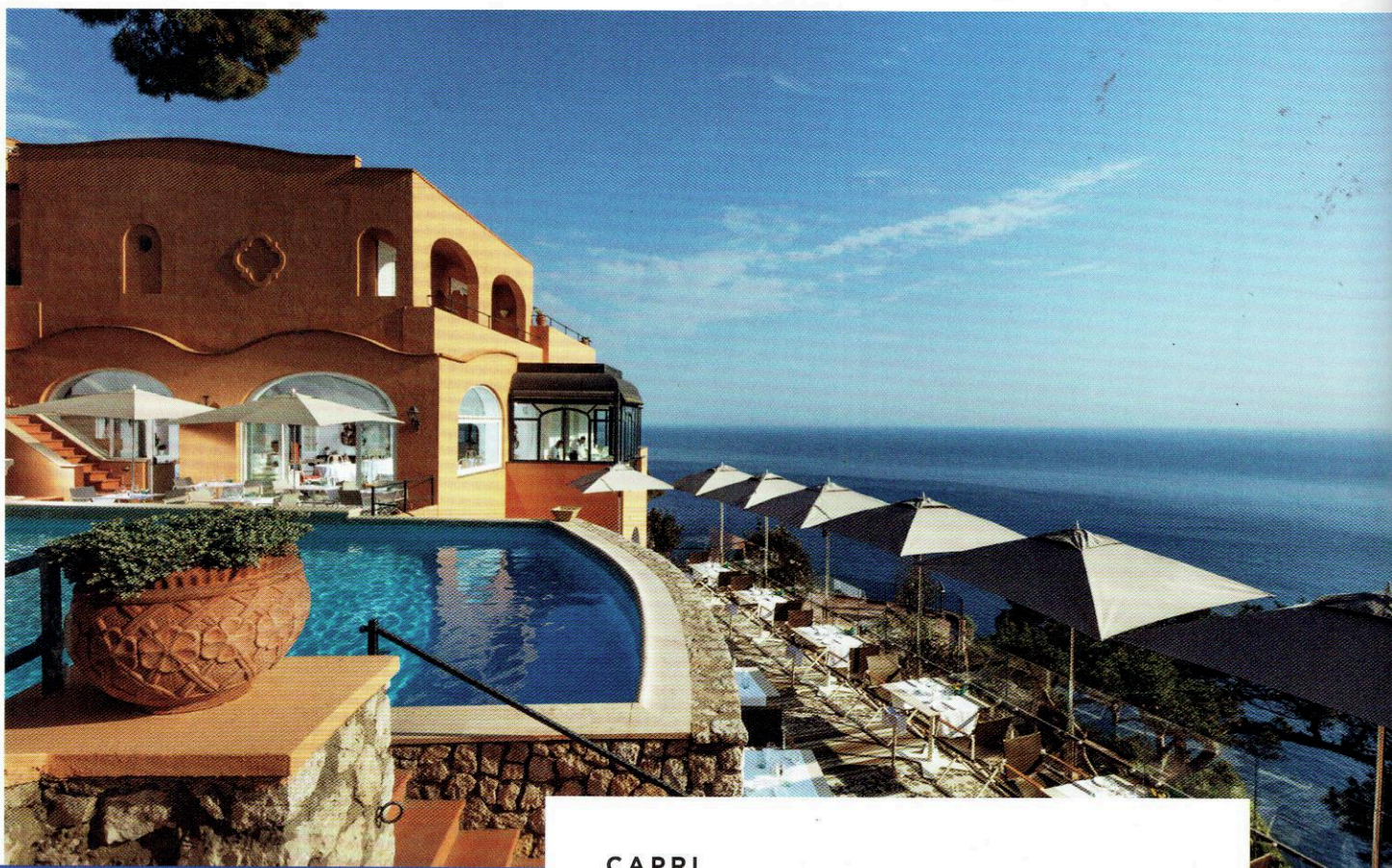
Some may find the interiors dated, but much is a reference to the hotel's history. Founded in 1834, the Belle Époque lives on here: from frescoed ceilings to ornate carriage clocks. A modern and impressive experience is hidden downstairs: Terrazza Bosquet, a restaurant with a tasting menu that deserves a second Michelin star for creative presentation alone.

Where Excelsior Vittoria shines in being slick, classic and well-established, independent restaurant Pepe Bianco is none of these things – and well worth taking a curious chance on for that reason alone. This newcomer feels like a warm culinary welcome from Sorrentine locals, and it is entirely possible that diners may receive a literal embrace from the chef or maître d' before leaving. The food is simple and hearty; anything involving tomatoes is a good bet, as they come fresh from Vesuvius. If there's still a lobster available, snap it up.

From €460 per night, exvitt.it; pepebiancosorrento.it

THIS PAGE,
FROM TOP
PRINCESS
MARGARET
SUITE;
RESTAURANT
VITTORIA; BOTH
© GRAND HOTEL
EXCELSIOR
VITTORIA





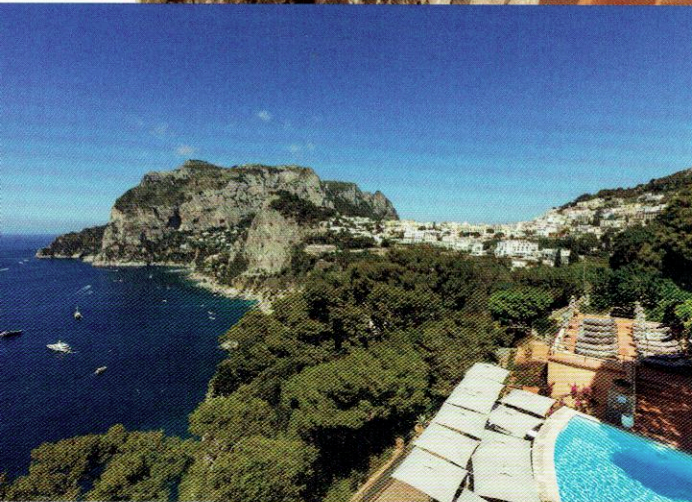
CAPRI

Capri is the most unwavering of all Italy's coastal destinations. Little needs to change as the years roll by, nor would anyone demand it. On the island's rockiest outcrop, next to the Faraglioni, sits Punta Tragara – the most secluded stay afforded. The only way to reach the hotel from port is a 15 minute stroll past the Piazzetta and luxury boutiques, down narrow leafy walkways where tourists rarely stumble. The reward: a modern hideaway with 44 design-led rooms (chief among them, a penthouse suite with its own roof space, freestanding glass box shower and circular bed).

Cinematic panoramas are de rigueur in Capri, but this hotel has a mini amphitheatre of its own sort: a pool surrounded by cacti and tiers of cushioned seating, overlooking the sea, yachts and rocks beyond. Perhaps unexpected in this terracotta sanctuary, however, is a gin bar with an array that rivals the finest establishments in London – a pleasant change from endless glasses of spritz and limoncello shots.

As for food, Mammà is Punta Tragara's sister restaurant, tucked away in the island's pedestrianised centre. It too holds a Michelin star and excels in contemporary Caprese fare, like vermicelli with sea urchins or mussel-scented rice. But after-dinner ice cream must be found by exploring on foot with a sense of adventure for company.

From €600 per night, hoteltragara.com; ristorantemamma.com



CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP PUNTA
TRAGARA; MAMMÀ
RESTAURANT AT
PUNTA TRAGARA;
JUNIOR SUITE;
VIEW FROM PUNTA
TRAGARA

