



Chillin' in Capri: Lounge poolside at the Hotel Caesar Augustus overlooking the Bay of Naples.

The Blue Island: Capri, Italy

The Isle of Capri is a magical place, boasting gorgeous scenery, thrilling history, and divine cuisine. BY JENNIFER CEASER

Since ancient times, Capri has been a destination for the rich and famous. In 29 BC, Caesar Augustus visited the island and was so taken with its natural beauty that he traded the neighboring island of Ischia to the city of Naples for it. Caesar's successor, Emperor Tiberius, ruled Rome from one of his 12 homes scattered across the island. Today you can spot Giorgio Armani's yacht in the harbor, and Catherine Zeta-Jones, Michael Douglas, Sophia Loren, and Nicolas Cage are regulars.

Located 10 miles from the port of Naples, Capri can only be reached by boat, by crossing the Gulf of Naples. Capri has two small cities: The largest is Capri Town, on the eastern half of the island, where most of the hotels, restaurants, and shops are located. We were headed to Anacapri, a smaller, less touristy spot about a quarter of a mile away at the top of the island. When we reached the Marina Grande, Capri's main harbor, we were greeted by a private taxi furnished by our hotel, and after a somewhat harrowing ride—the road is narrow, winding, and on the extreme edge of a cliff—we came around a curve and spotted a statue of Caesar

Augustus. We had arrived, intact.

The Hotel Caesar Augustus, perched on a site a thousand feet above the Bay of Naples, was originally built in the 1850s as the private residence of a wealthy German businessman. In the early 1900s, a Russian prince purchased the property and transformed it into a still more majestic residence, even commissioning a life-size statue of Emperor Augustus Caesar (a replica of the original, found at Rome's Villa Livia); it still stands on the same spot today. The Signorini family took over ownership in the mid-20th century, turning the property into a sumptuous hotel. It was a favorite of King Farouk of Egypt, who reserved a large suite year-round. Today, the 5-star property retains its historic charm, but has been newly renovated to include 21st-century conveniences such as Jacuzzi tubs, satellite television, and Wi-Fi access.

The Hotel Caesar Augustus has 56 guest rooms, including 14 suites, four of which are designated "special" suites. We stayed in one of these four, the aptly named Caesar Suite, which is situated in the main building. The enormous suite is stunning, built on an open plan, with columns and arches separating the bedroom from the sitting area; exposed brick; a terra cotta floor; and antique furniture. There are two bathrooms (the smaller has a toilet and sink, the

Restaurateur **Donatella Arpaia**, owner of Ama restaurant in SoHo, lives in New York but makes it back to Italy as often as she can. Here are her favorite spots when she visits Capri:

Bagni di Tiberio: "This beach is on the north side of Capri and was originally a private beach of the Emperor Tiberius." **La Perla Gioielli:** "I always pick up something unique at La Perla, the oldest jewelry shop on the island. The jewelry is incredible." **Piazza Umberto, 39-081-837-0641.** **The Underground:** "This disco/bar in Anacapri is very cosmopolitan—almost like a New York club, but with modest prices for drinks." **259 Via G. Orlandi, 39-081-837-2523.** **Il Quisi:** "This restaurant is inside the Grand Hotel Quisisana and is by far the best (and most expensive) restaurant on the island. Everything is impeccable." **2 Via Camerelle, 39-081-837-0788.** **Villa Jovis:** "For history buffs, this is a definite must-see. These are the remains of the Roman nobility's villas from the imperial Roman times. Emperor Tiberius built 12 villas, each dedicated to a Roman god; Villa Jovis, on top of Mount Tiberio, is amazing."



ABOVE: The Hotel Augustus Caesar's magnificent Caesar Suite. RIGHT: Classical statuary under the pergola at Villa San Michele in Anacapri. BELOW: The Faraglioni, rocky outcroppings that rise to more than 100 feet in the Bay of Naples, are known as the Rocks of the Sirens.



larger has a Jacuzzi) and a comfortable seating and dining area with huge windows opening onto an expansive terrace. The views are stunning, looking out over the Bay of Naples to Mount Vesuvius, Sorrento, Ischia, and Capri Town below. An iron gate leads to a small private garden boasting native flora—a lovely spot to enjoy our morning coffee.

From the garden, we walked down a set of stone steps to a stunning infinity pool that seemed to disappear over the side of the cliff. Here we relaxed on generously sized lounge chairs and soaked up the Mediterranean sun while inhaling the fragrant scents of lavender, jasmine, and roses. When it came time for lunch, we walked down another set of steps to dine

alfresco beneath an arbor, and enjoy classic local cuisine against the backdrop of the Italian coast. Fresh herbs from the hotel's own garden made for one of the most refreshing Caprese salads we've tasted, and the white wine, made from native Falanghina grapes, was the perfect accompaniment.

We could have stayed and soaked up the view all day, but there were sights to be seen. Just a five-minute walk from the hotel and we were in the town of Anacapri. Most of the shops cater strictly to tourists, and, with lemons being the island's main product, they are sold in every conceivable manner—from soaps to perfumes to the ubiquitous limoncello, a lemon liqueur. We bypassed the stalls filled with lemon tchotchkes and wandered over to the Piazza Vittoria, the town's charming main square. From there





Villa Jovis, once home to Roman emperor Tiberius, is now a fascinating ruin.

we headed up to Villa San Michele, the home of one of Capri's most famous residents, Axel Munthe, a Swedish physician who settled in Anacapri in 1887. Though he was a doctor by profession, he nurtured his love of art, culture, and historic preservation by creating this extraordinary villa and garden and filling it with antiquities, sculpture, and paintings. He became famous when he wrote *The Story of San Michele*, a memoir that attracted the interest of writers like Henry James and Somerset Maugham, and has been translated into 45 languages.

The villa, now a museum belonging to a Swedish cultural institute, is Munthe's valentine to Italy. He preserved Roman ruins found on the site, including one room with the customary décor from that era—red plaster walls on a black background—as well as tombs. The gardens, filled with relics that include Roman columns, busts of emperors, and a statue of a sphinx, are breathtakingly gorgeous—rich, verdant, and filled with the sound of chirping birds.

That evening in the Hotel Caesar Augustus's restaurant, La Terrazza di Lucullo, we enjoyed a candlelit dinner that featured an excellent octopus salad, a filling potato gâteau (made with smoked mozzarella, tomatoes, and basil), and a simple pasta dish, *scialatielli all'isola felice* ("happy island pasta"), with capers, tomatoes, and marjoram, and washed it down with a lovely Tuscan Chianti.

Early the next morning we set out for an all-day boat excursion around the island. Seeing Capri by boat is a must for any visitor; the beautiful terrain, stunning private villas perched atop cliffs, natural stone arches, and Roman and medieval ruins are best appreciated from this perspective. Of course, a dip in the Mediterranean Sea isn't too shabby, either. Our captain maneuvered the small motorboat into several grottos, including the Red and Green Grottos (so named because the water is colored by seaweed and inflorescence), the Sailor's Hotel (a large grotto that sheltered fishermen during storms), and the White Grotto (with reflections on the water created by white stalactites). Though the queue to get into the famous Grotto Azzura (Blue Grotto) is long—you must climb from your boat into a tiny rowboat and be ferried inside—it's worth the wait. The intense blue of the water and the reflections on the walls of the cavern are created by the natural refraction of daylight through an

underwater aperture. We weren't quite sure how it worked, but the effect was amazing.

We spent our final day exploring the town of Capri. No cars are allowed, so we were dropped off at the Centro Congressi, where we began our walk from the Piazza Umberto, the main square. Capri is a maze of winding streets crowded with restaurants, bars, hotels, and, of course, since it's Italy, great shopping. All the big names are there—Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci—but we discovered a few lesser-known boutiques, like Capri à Porter (51 Via Le Botteghe, 39-081-838-9447; capricapri.com), which makes precious embossed purses. We grabbed dinner at Aurora Restaurant and Pizzeria (18-22 Via Fuorlovido, 39-081-837-0181), one of the island's oldest restaurants, with the same family, the D'Alessios, running it for more than 100 years. The pizzas were all outstanding—especially the pizza *bianca* with mozzarella and arugula—as was the wine selection (the cellar contains about 300 labels).

Afterward, we headed back to the Hotel Caesar Augustus for the last time. We had drinks in the main salon in front of a roaring fireplace (Capri evenings can get chilly) before going for one final walk along the terrace and taking in the twinkling lights of the Italian coastline below. *Hotel Caesar Augustus*, 4 Via G Orlandi, Anacapri, Italy, 39-081-837-3395; caesar-augustus.com; rooms about \$384; suites from about \$744; Caesar Suite, about \$1,081. Open April to October 31.

It Takes a Village: Forte Village Resort, Sardinia, Italy

Gorgeous white-sand beaches, lush gardens, and luxurious accommodations—c'mon you deserve a slice of Italy. BY DANA FOWLER

Tucked away in the Mediterranean is a place that's been trumpeted by Europeans for years, and is quickly becoming a hot spot for celebrities (David and Victoria Beckham, Sting and Trudie Styler) and other travelers who want the ultimate resort experience. Forte Village Resort is designed to be a place where the vacationer can relax, indulge, shop, and be pampered—all without leaving the enclave. Located on 55 acres of the southwest coast of Sardinia, this sprawling retreat, awarded the World Travel Awards' prestigious World's Leading Resort title for the seventh consecutive year,