



Positano

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SPECIAL REPORT: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AMALFI COAST

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INSIDERS REVEAL THE BEST OF THE Amalfi Coast

The *Amalfi Coast* has been welcoming visitors since Roman times and remains a must on any Italy travel bucket list. Many of you also return again and again as the charming towns and alluring islands of the *Costiera Amalfitana* hold more treasures than one can possibly explore in even a few trips.

Who knows the area better than Amalfi's ultimate insiders: hoteliers whose luxury properties make this a coveted destination. *Dream of Italy* Executive Editor Bethanne Patrick talked to these owners and managers about what's not-to-be-missed and



Fontelina Beach Club

what's worth your time and travel dollars. Their answers appear above the lines in each box and below the lines, we've provided additional information.

While some of their recommendations will be familiar, not only does their imprimatur give emphasis—we've also nabbed some of their never-before-revealed secrets. If they occasionally recommend their own hotel's services, you can be sure it's because they believe those are—the very best. Also note that this isn't in any way a comprehensive list but a great start to planning a trip to this magical place.

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Piazza Tasso, Sorrento

Why I Come Back to Sorrento

I skirted around *Sorrento* for decades—avoiding what I'd written off as a tourist resort, and visiting the wonders of *Naples*, *Pompeii* and *Amalfi Coast* towns instead. Then my friend *Gioia*, a well-travelled Roman native, confessed: "You know where I've *always* wanted to go? Sorrento!" Her Italian friends had sung its praises, and though she'd spent many summers in nearby *Capri*, she'd also skipped this destination.

Cut to our arrival at Sorrento's *Imperial Hotel Tramontano*. *Oohs* and *aahs* ensued from the moment we stepped into the elegant lobby that opens to a cliffside terrace, hanging over the sparkling Mediterranean Sea. We immediately ordered *Prosecco* and took a seat with a view of Mount Vesuvius in the distance. Thus my love affair began, to the strains of *Come Back to Sorrento*, that soulful song, composed at this very hotel.

Since that first visit, I've come back to Sorrento often. I've been won over far beyond the obvious reasons: Its breathtaking coast that inspired the Greeks to name it *Surrentum*, believing that this was the spot where mythical creatures lured

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The Amalfi Drive is 25 miles long.

Best View

Guido Fiorentino, Owner, Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria: *From the San Costanzo mountain, above a path that leads to Punta Campanella*

Part of the ancient Roman *Via Minerva*, this trail winds through vast olive groves to nearly 1,500 feet above sea level. (For a guide: www.cartotrekking.com)

Antonio Sersale, Owner, Hotel Le Sirenuse: *Just above Positano, at the top of the steps to the village of Nocelle*

Nocelle is an isolated mountain village above Positano; its views stretch from Amalfi to Naples. (Try the view from *Ristorante Santa Croce* on Via Nocelle; 39-37-11758097)

Gabriella Guida, Manager, Hotel Pupetto: *At sunset on the terrace of the Hotel San Pietro*

The *San Pietro* features its own helipad; go for a cocktail and enjoy the same view as celebrities. (www.ilsanpietro.it)

Martino Acampora, Manager, JK Capri: *Belvedere Migliera Capri*

Head west of *Anacapri* on *Via Migliera* to find an unspoiled trail leading to an unspoiled view of the Faraglioni rock formations.

Bianca Sharma, Owner, and **Nathan Sharma**, Managing Partner, Monastero Santa Rosa: *Montepertuso, above Positano*

If you hike up to this "pierced rock," not only will you find views of Li Galli islands, you'll be able to drink its microbiologically pure spring water.



Li Galli

The Amalfi Insiders Panel



Guido Fiorentino
Owner, Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria



Antonio Sersale
Owner, Hotel Le Sirenuse



Gabriella Guida
Manager, Hotel Pupetto



Martino Acampora
Manager, JK Capri



Bianca Sharma
Owner,
Monastero Santa Rosa



Nathan Sharma
Managing Partner,
Monastero Santa Rosa

Best Tour Guide

Fiorentino: Mr. Mastogiacomo from the Guide Centre

Sorrento's Guide Centre offers excursions everywhere from *Pompeii* to *Procida*. (www.guidecentre.com)

Sersale: Cristian Fusco. Visit a winery with him!

Positano born and raised, Fusco started his career at Il San Pietro and developed his passion for wines in London. (www.swirltheglass.com)

Guida: Lucia, known as "Zia Lucy"

The original *Zia Lucy* (Aunt Lucy) was this one's great-aunt, who moved to America but inspired her little relative to appreciate her Positano

home. Her treks, cooking courses and kayak excursions are first rate. (www.zialucy.com; prices from 55€)

Acampora: Sascha Acampora

Could there be a family connection? No matter. Sascha Acampora works for *Carrani Tours*, an all-Italy operation that specializes in hiring guides who know their region intimately. (www.carrani.com; prices range from 39€ to 135€)

Sharmas: Michelangelo Criscuolo

Not only is Criscuolo a gifted storyteller, but he has years of experience working with people of all ages; he's perfect for a multigenerational family group. (39-339-7354711, michelangeloguidecenter@hotmail.it; prices are 120€ for a half day and 180€ for a full day)

Best Hidden Treasure

Fiorentino: *The gardens of Antica Tenuta Il Pizzo*

39 acres of historic plants—on a cliff hanging over the sea near Sorrento in *Piano di Sorrento*. (www.bit.ly/2av0TQB)

Sersale: *Steps to Nocelle*

You might prefer the downward view to these 1,700 steps, not only because you'll rest your quadriceps, but because of the awesome views.

Guida: *The Path of the Gods*

Until about 20 years ago, the steps to Nocelle and thus the Path of the Gods were more frequently used. New and more frequent bus service has changed that.



Path of the Gods

Acampora: *The Path of the Gods*

There are several restaurants up those many steps and along the path worth trying, but here we'll recommend *Il Ritrovo* in *Positano* (Via Montepertuso; 39-089- 812005) and *Da Giovanni* in *Nocelle* (Via Raffaele Bosco, 192; 39-081-8798615)

Sharmas: *Amalfi Lemon Tour*

On this unique tour devoted to lemons, you'll become something of a "lemonologist" learning their local history, how they are harvested and taste foods made with this pride of the Amalfi Coast. (www.amalfilemonexperience.it)

Best Hike

Fiorentino: *Jeranto Bay*

A gorgeous nature preserve maintained by the *Fondo Ambiente Italiano* (Italian Environmental Fund) that includes a protected marine reserve. (www.naplesldm.com/jeranto.html)



Sersale: *Path of the Gods*

Another triple threat from our insiders, the *Sentiero dei Degli* or Path of the Gods provides spectacular views of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Bay of Naples. (www.positano.com)

Guida: *Path of the Gods*

If possible, walk the Path of the Gods from *Agerola* to *Nocelle*, as it winds gently downhill in this direction.

Acampora: *Sentiero dei Fortini Capri*

The *Sentiero dei Fortini* on *Capri* hugs the coastline and offers a path between three 19th-century British blockhouses. (www.capri.com)

Sharmas: *Path of the Gods*

The three-hour walk isn't too rugged, but it does have narrow paths with downward views; vertigo sufferers might prefer to remain in *Positano* proper!

Most Romantic Experience

Fiorentino: *Enjoying the sunset from one of our terraces*

Sersale: *Dinner at La Sponda at Le Sirenuse*

The to-die-for-views at this *Le Sirenuse* restaurant make for a romantic evening.

Guida: *Sunset cruise to Li Galli*

The sirens sang to Odysseus from this trio of tiny islands; perhaps they will to you and your lover. (www.cassioopera-positano.com)

Acampora: *Dinner cruise to the Faraglioni*

Enjoy a four-course seafood meal while taking in the *Faraglioni* rock formations iconic to *Capri*. (www.giannisboat.com)

Villa Treville in Positano

The former private villa of film director *Franco Zeffirelli* is now a boutique hotel. (www.villatreville.com) —**Sharmas**

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Best Meal

Fiorentino: *Nerano-style spaghetti with eggplant*

Note that three Amalfi insiders chose the hamlet of Nerano's signature *spaghetti con zucchini* or *con melanzane* (eggplant), a treat that's rich and creamy without eggs or cream.

Sersale: *Nerano-style spaghetti with zucchini*

Listed below are three of Nerano's restaurants best known for this dish; *Maria Grazia* claims



to be the place that "invented" spaghetti with zucchini. (*Lo Scoglio*: www.hotelloscoglio.com; *Maria Grazia*: www.ristorantemariagrazia.com; *Taverna del Capitano*: www.tavernadelcapitano.it)

Guida: *Rice balls and glass of wine at Hotel Buca di Bacco*

So close to the seaside you can practically dangle your toes in the water while you eat. (Hotel Buca di Bacco is in Positano; www.bucadibacco.it)

Acampora: *At Hotel JK Capri, Genovese meatballs made from Agerolese beef, Alife onions, Vesuvian olive oil, aged provolone, Ceylon cinnamon and bay leaves*

If only they could grow the cinnamon on the Amalfi Coast, this would be an amazing locavore creation.

Sharmas: *Nerano-style spaghetti with zucchini*

P.S.: The creaminess of the pasta comes from using two different types of cheese, hard like *Parmigiano-Reggiano*, and semi-hard, like *provolone del Monaco*.

Best Water Experience

A trip to Nerano (or Sorrento or Ischia)

Nothing will get you in the Amalfi spirit faster than a boat trip, and it needn't be a long one. A jaunt to the mainland or nearby *Ischia* will provide sun, salt and sea air. (Try a day trip with www.sorrentoexperience.com) —**Fiorentino**

Boat swim in front of the flat rocks at Scogli Piatti

Some of the best beaches can only be reached by boat. Hire a *gozzo* in Positano and have them take you to *Scogli Piatti* (Rock Plates) beach for a swim and a sunbath. (Get there with www.positanoboats.com) —**Sersale**

Arienzo in Positano

It takes 300 steps to reach the *Bagni d'Arienzo*, but it's worth anybody's time, especially as there's a restaurant, bar, and area in which to rent just about any bathing needs you'd like, from umbrellas to deckchairs. Plus, there's a shuttle in case you'd prefer to skip the steps. (www.bagnidarienzo.com) —**Guida**

Boat to Nerano

If you've been on Capri too long (is that even possible?), take a sleek motorboat to Nerano on the mainland for a moonlit dinner with, perhaps, the freshest fish and vegetables you'll ever have the pleasure of eating. (Try www.giannisboats.com) —**Acampora**

Gozzo boats

Forget the Chris Craft of your at-home dreams; while in Amalfi, spend at least one day on a *gozzo* boat, which is a motorboat with a large sundeck for plenty of tanning and lounging time. Renting one is the perfect way to spend a day swimming in the sea. (Try www.giannisboats.com) —**Sharmas**

1€ = \$1.12 at press time

The Local You Must Meet

Fiorentino: *Tonino Galano, Head Concierge, Excelsior Vittoria*

"Their Head Concierge *Antonio Galano* should get some kind of award for being the best in the business," a satisfied guest said in an online review.

Sersale: *Sergio Bella, runs Da Adolfo on Laurito Beach*

Sergio is Adolfo Bella's son. Read the family's story on their website, then get to this tiny place and try their mozzarella grilled on lemon leaves. (In Positano: www.daadolfo.com)



Paolo Sandulli

Guida: *Luciano in Fornillo at his private baracca*

In a modest wooden hut right on Positano's *Fornillo* beach lives one of the town's best characters, *Luciano*. Knock, and if he's home, he'll tell you local stories and probably invite you in for a meal and a glass of wine.

Acampora: *Mamma Rafaella, cooking classes*

In *Montepertuso* above Positano, *Ristorante Donna Rosa* has a cooking school overseen by the lady of the house, *Mamma Rafaella*. (www.drpositano.com; classes about 150€ per person)

Sharmas: *Paolo Sandulli*

Based in an old Saracen tower in *Praiano*, local artist *Sandulli* charms everyone as he recounts local myths and legends—some that relate to his pieces, some that don't! (www.paolosandulli.com)

The island of *Capri* is a

Best Souvenir

Fiorentino: *Inlaid wood pieces from Sorrento*

Sorrento is famous for this *intarsia*, and even has a museum dedicated to its artisans. Visit *A. Gargiulo & Jannuzzi Woodworks* on Viale E. Caruso, 1. (www.gargiulo-jannuzzi.it)

Sersale: *A pair of Le Sirenuse swim trunks*

Or a bikini! Or a caftan... *Emporio Sirenuse*, curated by Sersale's wife and business partner Carla, offers swimwear designed by British style maven Allegra Hicks. (www.emporiosirenuse.com)



Guida: *Handmade sandals (Capri)*

You can find terrific sandals all over the Amalfi Coast, but why not stop in at a workshop where they're not only made entirely by hand, but you can also meet the cobbler? Try *Da Costanzo* (Via Roma, 49, Capri)

Acampora: *Handmade sandals (Sorrento)*

The beautifully crafted sandals in Sorrento are a bit more refined than those in smaller places on the coast, as befits this stylish small city. Try *Sandali Corcione*. (www.sandalicorcione.com)

Sharmas: *Ceramics*

Who doesn't love a great piece of hand-painted ceramic ware from the Amalfi Coast? For the best selection, service, and shipping, use a fine dealer, like the one we recommend in Positano. (www.ceramicassunta.it)

Best Bar

Fiorentino: *Vittoria Bar Terrace*

Enjoy a "spreetz" cocktail (a "spritz" is almost anything made with Prosecco and/or sparkling water) while resting your eyes on the beautiful Bay of Naples.

Sersale: *Franco's at Le Sirenuse*

After Don Francesco Saverio dei Marchesi Sersale's 2015 death, his son and daughter-in-law *Antonio* and *Carla Sersale* opened a new bar in his honor at Le Sirenuse, and it's as elegant and sparkling as he was.



Franco's

Guida: *Bar Internazionale in Positano*

Bar Internazionale is still the place to get the best news, gossip, and espresso in town. In the morning, don't miss the delicious *cornetti*. (Via G. Marconi, 36)

Acampora: *Bar Fauno in Sorrento*

Coffee, cocktails, gelato, pastries, pizza, nibbles—but even better, a hip Art Deco vibe in the center of Sorrento where everybody who's anybody can be seen. (www.fauubar.it)

Sharmas: *Lido Azzurro in Amalfi*

You can't dine much closer to water than at the *Lido Azzurro*, set at the edge of the sand in Amalfi's harbor and the seafood is fantastic. The Sharmas also appreciate the superb wine list. (www.ristorantelidoazzurro.it)

Best Seaside Restaurant

Fiorentino: *Terrazza Bosquet*

The Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria boasts a Michelin-worthy restaurant with such historic elegance and stunning views; take a look at the menu, which offers dishes made with oranges from the hotel's own groves, for example, pasta with shrimp in orange sauce.

Sersale: *Da Adolfo in Positano*

It's not on the main drag, which is one mark in Da Adolfo's favor. The second is that you can swim to it if you like, and the third is that its white wine with peaches will hydrate you after all that exercise. (www.daadolfo.com)

Guida: *Pupetto in Fornillo*

Ristorante Albergo Pupetto provides expansive views of the Tyrrhenian Sea beneath a canopy of scented vines—and its food is pretty terrific, including wood-fired-oven pizzas. (www.hotelpupetto.it)

Acampora: *Lo Scoglio in Nerano*

Scoglio means "boulder," so it's fitting that this place built its restaurant on top of one—you can hear the waves crashing against it as you tuck into a plate of—yes—*spaghetti con zucchini*. (www.hotelloscoglio.com)

Sharmas: *La Conca del Sogno in Nerano*

So pretty, so relaxing, so dreamy as the name implies. You can arrive in your own boat or drive and the restaurant will ferry you to the seaside location in their shuttle boat. Famous for its raw seafood. (www.concadelosogno.it)

single block of limestone.

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Odysseus off course, and its location that makes it an ideal base to ferry off to Capri (20 minutes), Amalfi Coast villages and Naples, or to discover the ruins of Pompeii by train in under an hour.

What I've grown to love most about Sorrento is how Old World graciousness is kept alive here by the spirited natives, who follow in a tradition of hospitality that began here in the days of the Grand Tour, when visitors like Byron, Wagner and Ibsen checked into Sorrento hotels for long, inspirational stays. Yes, it's a tourist resort, but so sincerely rooted in the passionate, generous soul of the *Mezzogiorno*, that I'm forever swept up with its details of personal enchantments.

Take, for instance, the Hotel Tramontano. Though it's a property with hundreds of rooms, when I ask for a wake-up call, *Gennaro* from the desk rings me up with a genuine *Buon Giorno* (no automated recording here!), and when I return to my room after a day of sightseeing I find that my bed's been made with a scarf I'd tossed aside, carefully shaped into a heart outline on my pillow.

Or in the fabulous *Centro Storico* shopping vias, jeweler *Rosalba* sweetly shows me how she makes cameos, with her endearing smile and curvy tool in hand, carving a conch shell. Steps away, Anna at the scarf shop

takes the time to teach me how to tie a chic Valentino knot.

Meals here are delicious, stretched out affairs, served by attentive, dark-eyed waiters, who take pride in Sorrento's star dishes: *Gnocchi alla Sorrentina*, eggplant parmesan, braciolo. Robust wines from the fertile slopes of Mount Vesuvius vineyards flow freely, and at dinner's end, a chilled glass of *limoncello* is typically brought over, compliments of the house.

For fresh seafood and a folksy change of scene, I head down a zig-zag stone pathway to the *Marina Grande*, a lively spread of beaches and restaurants. In the evenings a mandolin player strolls about, playing the song I've learned by heart: "*Vide 'o mare quant e bello, Spira tantu sentimento.*" (See the sea how beautiful, it inspires so many emotions...) The mandolin player gives me a wink as I join in, then throws his head back for the dramatic finish, sending the plaintive note, filled with Sorrento passion, into the starry night.

Here are three of my favorite reasons to return to Sorrento:

Cloisters of San Francesco

It's magical to slip into this small 12th-century cloister, part of the San

Francesco church complex. Moorish pillars blend in remains of pagan temples, surrounded by tumbling bougainvillea, fragrant roses, and bird songs. It's a popular place for weddings and classical music concerts in summer.

Upstairs from this oasis are galleries, where displays of such treasures as vintage music boxes can be discovered. The adjoining Baroque church is beautiful and on the piazza is *Ristobar*—perfect for gelato, coffee or cocktails with a view—and the



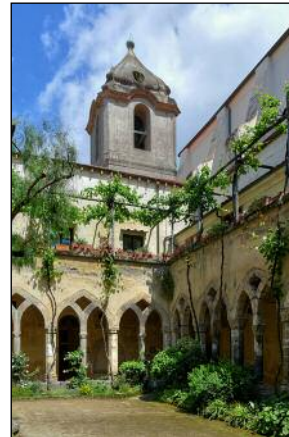
Imperial Hotel Tramontano



Sorrento street



Seafood at Marina Grande



Cloisters of San Francesco

Sorrento Lift

(www.sorrentolift.it), an elevator that easily takes you down to the *Marina Piccolo* ferry port for 1€. (*Via San Francesco, 1; Open daily; Free admission*)

Museum of Inlaid Wood

Sorrento's artistic tradition of *intarsia* (inlaid wood) is celebrated in *Museobottega della Tarsialignea's* dazzling collection, which includes masterpieces from 1400 to the days of the Grand Tour (music boxes, treasure chests), along with contemporary designs. It's the private collection of *Alma* and *Alessandro Fiorentino*, a Sorrento architect who lovingly restored this palazzo from 1700 and opened the museum in 1999. (*Via San Nicola, 28; www.museomuta.it; 39-081-877-1942; Open daily; 8€*)

Baths of Queen Giovanna

Legend says 14th-century *Queen Giovanna d'Anjou* loved to bathe nude in the lagoon here. I, wearing a bathing suit, had an adventurous morning at

Surriento is the town's original

Johanna Jacobsen

Ross Elliott, flickr.com

these baths with my friend Anna arriving from a rocky path off the main road, that opens to a stunning panorama of the sea. I'd recommend rubber-soled shoes for the climb into the lagoon, where we discovered a cool, crystal clear pool.



Baths of Queen Giovanna



Baths of Queen Giovanna

It was dreamy to ease into shallow, sparkling turquoise water of the *Bagni della Regina Giovanna*, then swim through an arch into the open bay, where waving to ferries in the distance

was one of the most exhilarating of all my Italy swimming experiences. On a cliff nearby are ruins (foundation stones) of a 1st-century Roman villa—perfect for sunbathing, though legend goes Queen Giovanna

preferred to use the cliffs to toss away her lovers so their trysts would be kept secret! Around the bend is a wooden boardwalk set over rocks that leads to *Lido La Solara*—a lively beach club, bar and restaurant. (To reach the baths, take a 45-minute walk from Sorrento's Piazza Tasso or the LINE A Bus from Tasso and get off at Capo di Sorrento, then it's a 10 minute walk in. The beach club is at Calata Punta del Capo.)

—Susan Van Allen

A frequent contributor to Dream of Italy, Susan Van Allen is the author of 100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go. Find out more at

The Details

Check out www.sorrentotourism.com for year-round events as Sorrento is in full-swing even in low season with sparkling Christmas celebrations.

Getting to Sorrento

Take the Campania Express, a new *Circumvesuviana* train is specially designed for tourists, running March through October, from Naples to Sorrento in 50 minutes with stops at *Herculaneum* and *Pompeii*. (www.eavsrl.it)

Hop on the ferry from Naples for the 40-minute ride to Sorrento. (www.naplesbayferry.com or www.alilauro.it)

Hire a private driver like Sorrento native, *Salvatore D'Esposito*, who lived in New Jersey for 30 years and speaks perfect English. (39-333-6985466, salamerican@hotmail.it)



Where to Stay

Imperial Hotel Tramontano

Via Vittorio Veneto, 1
(39) 081 8782588
www.hoteltramontano.it
Rates: Doubles start at 150€ per night, with breakfast.

This elegant historical property has been welcoming travelers since 1812, with a pool and excellent restaurant.

Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria

Piazza Torquato Tasso, 34
(39) 081 8777111
www.exvitt.it

Rates: Rooms start at 225€ per night, with breakfast.

Sorrento's most luxurious property has been run by the *Fiorentino* family since 1834. It's surrounded by a 5-acre gorgeously landscaped garden and citrus grove, plus there's a spa to add to the bliss.

Hotel Admiral Sorrento

Via Marina Grande, 214
(39) 081 8781076
www.admiralsorrento.com
Rates: Rooms start at 125€ per night, with breakfast

Set beachside on the folksy *Marina Grande*, modern, airy rooms here come with terraces.

Where to Eat

L'Antica Trattoria

Via P. R. Giuliani, 3
(39) 081 8071082
www.lanticatrattoria.com

In the heart of the historic center, enjoy traditional Sorrento specialties in beautiful cozy dining areas or back patio draped with grape vines.

Il Buco

2a Rampa Marina Piccola, 5
(39) 081 8782354
www.ilbucoistorante.it
Closed Wednesday

Traditional Sorrento recipes are given a modern twist at this chic, contemporary-designed spot.

Da Emilia

Marina Grande, 62
(39) 081 8072720
www.daemilia.it
Closed Tuesday

The freshest catch of the day is celebrated in this welcoming beachside restaurant, with delicious specialties such as *gnocchi ai frutti di mare*.

Where to Shop

Roseta

Via Fuoro, 9
(39) 081 8772716

Lovely *Made in Italy* scarves and ties, with classic signora shopkeepers who teach you the art of scarf tying.

Gargiulo Inlaid

Via Fuoro, 33
(39) 081 8782420
www.gargiuloinlaid.it

Gorgeous wood inlay—jewelry boxes, treasure chests, and clocks. You can see artisan *Salvatore* and his father *Giuseppe* at work, following a tradition begun by his family in the 19th century.

Miele Gioelli

Via Fuoro 57
(39) 081 19004041

Sweetheart *Signorina Rosalba* crafts exquisite jewelry here—blending corals, cameos, and semi-precious stones in southern Italian traditional style. She can custom-design a piece for you or sit you down for a jewelry-making lesson.

1€ = \$1.12 at press time

name in Neapolitan dialect.

The Insiders' Hotels

Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria

Sorrento
www.exvitt.it
The recently refurbished grande dame — since 1834 — of the Amalfi Coast. Rates start at 225€ per night.

JK Capri

Capri
www.jkcapri.com
Sister hotel of JK Florence and JK Rome. Worth the splurge. Rates start at 700€.

Hotel Pupetto

Positano
www.hotelpupetto.it
Every room has a sea view balcony in this 3-star gem. Rates start at 140€.

Hotel Le Sirenuse

Positano
www.sirenuse.it
Perched high on cliff and once a favorite of John Steinbeck, Le Sirenuse is truly one of the great hotels of Italy. Rates start at 500€.

Monastero Santa Rosa

Conca dei Marini
www.monasterosantarosa.com
Housed in a former monastery, one of Amalfi's newest hotels is also one of its most breathtaking. See the November 2013 issue of *Dream of Italy* for more. Rates start at 400€.

Best Place to Avoid Crowds

Fiorentino: Excelsior Vittoria Gardens

Few luxury hotels have their own orchards. The Excelsior Vittoria's olive, orange and lemon groves not only buffer guests from the hustle of city life—they're a peaceful spot for non-guests to take a break from that hustle, too.



Positano!) to Fornillo Beach. Same waters, less-hectic vibe.

—Acampora: JK Place Capri

Who can blame Signor Acampora for recommending his own hotel as respite? JK Capri offers luxury to overnight guests and temporary (during meals) guests as well, offering a serene respite from the day trippers. (www.jkcapri.com)

JK Capri

recommending his own hotel as respite? JK Capri offers luxury to overnight guests and temporary (during meals) guests as well, offering a serene respite from the day trippers. (www.jkcapri.com)

Sharmas: Agriturismo Serafina in Furore

Don't overlook one of the loveliest of *agriturismi*. Serafina's views, cuisine and owners are all first rate, and totally off the beaten path in a town also worth a visit for its stunning fjord. (www.agriturismoserafina.it)

Guida: Via dei Mulini in Positano

Positano's trendy "Street of the Millers" will take you past emporia full of chic sandals, *Moda Positano* linen clothing, gorgeous ceramics, and plenty of *limoncello* for sale.

Acampora: La Fontelina Beach Club, Capri

You needn't be a member to lounge in the sun while gazing up close to the Faraglioni rocks. Bonus: Sip. Dine. Repeat. (www.fontelina-capri.com)

Sharmas: "Madonna vs The Devil" at Montepertuso

This summertime fireworks tribute to the Madonna's triumph over evil is a great way to take in an Italian festival and local color in a tiny mountainside town. Usually held at the beginning of July.

Best For Kids

Fiorentino: Snorkeling the marine-protected gulf near our hotel

The waters of Punta Campanella's conservation area sparkle—and so will your kids' eyes after they finish a snorkeling excursion there. The Excelsior Vittoria has an elevator to take you directly from the lobby to the Bay of Naples.

Sersale: Arienzo Beach in Positano

Positano's *Arienzo* is nicknamed the "300 steps beach," because that's approximately how many it takes to reach it! Not only does this beach enjoy the sun longer than the *Spiaggia Grande* and *Laurito* beaches—it has a beautiful mansion backdrop.

Guida: Playing with locals on any beach

Many Italian tour insiders recommend bringing your children where their local counterparts are just seeing what kind of fun develops. Add water and you've got a magic mix.

Acampora: Water sports in Sorrento

The city proper lacks a good beach, but just mile out of town lies the *Bagni Regina Giovanna*, with a bonus: This pretty beach with clear water is set among the ruins of a Roman villa, so your history buff will have some fun along with your sporty kid.

Sharmas: Gelato!

Just because it's a perfect answer doesn't mean there's an easy answer; gelato preferences are as various as Italian gestures. But we highly recommend Sorrento's *Gelateria David* for excellence, selection, heritage and sheer deliciousness. The shop also offers gelato-making classes. (www.gelateriadavidsorrento.it)

Can't Miss

Fiorentino: Punta Campanella

The beauty of Punta Campanella — by land or by sea — can hardly be matched. Enjoy a marine-protected area featuring chalky cliffs, peaceful trails, abundant nature and ruins of Roman villas. (www.puntacampanella.org)

Sersale: Music on the Rocks in Positano

This 40-year-old nightclub will delight you with sparkling lights inside what may be the world's only dance experience set inside a cave, just off Positano's *Spiaggia Grande*. (www.musicontherocks.it)

Positano is known as "the vertical city."