



# THE OTHER CAPRI

WHILE THE JET SET ARE GLAMMING IT UP ON THE MAIN STREETS OF CAPRI, INTELLECTUALS, ARTISTS AND WRITERS FIND ARTISTIC INSPIRATION IN THE LESSER KNOWN ENCLAVE OF ANACAPRI. DISCOVER THE MANY FACES OF ITALY'S MOST ALLURING ISLE

WORDS | MARESA MANARA



It's Saturday morning and cafe owner Gennaro D'Onofrio is preparing his cliff-top establishment for the busy day ahead. After lugging crates of pungent coffee beans down Capri's narrow stone steps, his forehead glistens with beads of sweat, which trickle down a weathered brown cheek into his black beard. The gruff looking Italian ambles over and leans against the freshly-painted bar,

cluttered with empty espresso cups and the flaky remains of croissants devoured by local fishermen sometime before dawn.

"They're here every morning, those fishermen," Gennaro tells me, pulling a cloth from his apron and wiping his brow. Behind the counter, his wife Anna Maria pulls the last tray of pastries from the wood-fire oven and tosses them, piping hot, into a bread basket.

On cue, an American couple wanders over, drawn by the sweet scent of bread wafting from the tiny cafe into the narrow streets plaiting their way up the hillside. "She works hard," says Gennaro, nodding towards Anna Maria. "I work hard and the fishermen work hard. We take the boat over from Naples in May, work for the season and stay until the island closes in September. But look at the view. What could be better than this?"

Gennaro has a point. Whether virtue or vice, the little island of Capri possesses an almost unearthly beauty. From our cliff top vantage point, Italy's biggest draw-card is laid out before us, Naples's sapphire bay sparkling under the early morning sun. The island's pristine, pine-filled hills are freckled with spectacular white villas tumbling like dominoes towards the limestone cliffs that plunge into the Sorrentine Peninsula below.

To the right, a cluster of speedboats charge through the Mediterranean towards Capri's famed Grotta Azzurra – a natural grotto revered for the blue hues and silvery light that emanate from its waters. "I always think I'll go to Ischia one year," admits Gennaro, pointing to one of the other major islands in the Neapolitan Gulf. "But even on my days off I'd

rather stay in Capri. This island casts a spell on people. You'll see."

The clanging of copper pots abruptly ends our chat, as three tired-looking fishermen swagger down the stone steps swinging buckets of silver-scaled fish. Soon the first tourist bus of the day will arrive. Gennaro pushes his chair back from the table. "Time to get back to work." =>

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For Jackie Kennedy, Rita Hayworth and Ingrid Bergman, Capri was a luxuriant hideaway where they could flee the paparazzi during the years of *la dolce vita*

Despite several years of living in Italy, this was my first time on the island of Capri. I'd always spent my holidays in other parts of this rich and varied country: I couldn't see the appeal of an island I'd imagined to be overrun with hordes of tourists and tacky souvenir shops. Tourists, admittedly, come to Capri in droves, beckoned by the warm climate, glorious pine-forested hills and the beautiful Mediterranean. But an Italian friend convinced me to go, promising me that Capri was a yet-to-be-discovered island filled with untouched beauty and intrigue. With a description like that, how could I resist?

Unsurprisingly, I wasn't the only one. Around midday, the world's young and wealthy high society make their way down the cobbled path to Il Riccio, Capri's exclusive beach club.

Louis Vuitton totes filled with fluffy beach towels, silver bikinis and matching stilettos to a neat array of sun lounges.

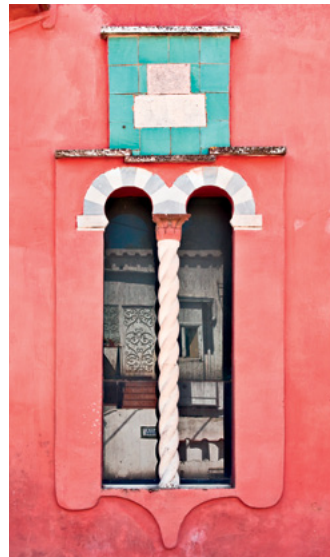
An afternoon at Il Riccio is the ultimate indulgence. Part of the Capri Palace Hotel and Spa, the beach club terrace and restaurant has been one of Capri's most exclusive establishments ever since Aristotle Onassis dropped anchor below, giving Capri regulars Jackie Kennedy, Rita Hayworth and Ingrid Bergman a luxuriant hideaway where they could flee the paparazzi during the years of *la dolce vita*. Il Riccio's guests look like they've never worked a day in their life. They're in the right place: Capri has long been known as the island of *il dolce far niente* – the sweet art of doing nothing.

I meet Sammi and Jarred at the beach club, fresh off a flight from Beverly Hills. Sammi's brought her Chihuahua Tim Tam along, and he peeks out from her tote bag every time an immaculate waiter strides past carrying a silver platter of stirred martinis.

"I just love Capri," draws Sammi, tying her long blonde hair back and gingerly stepping down to the rocks, where Il Riccio commands private access to the sea. "I've got a wedding in Malibu on Monday, but had to bring Jarred to my favourite island, even if it was only for a few days. I come here every year – it's so beautiful and relaxing and the shopping is amazing." After a plunge in the Mediterranean, we dine on fresh lobster on the secluded deck, surrounded by sun-tanned guests adorned in diamonds and pearls. Capri's A-list credentials date back to the Roman empire and show no signs of waning.

But Capri offers much more than glitterati glamour. On the other side of town, high on the hills of Anacapri, Gigi Bove is swinging on a hammock in his garden. Like many people I meet on the island, Gigi comes over to spend the Italian summers here at his holiday house, which he converted into a bed and breakfast.

Gigi's light, airy home is something of an institution in Anacapri – the island's lesser known, quieter village which rises high above the more bustling township of Capri. Since opening his home to visitors last year, Gigi has refused to advertise, preferring to establish his clientele through word of mouth. This way he can show visitors from Italy and the world what he calls the "real" Capri. "People come to Capri for inspiration, for its nature, its colours," he tells me one warm afternoon, washing tomatoes he plucked from his garden. ⇒



**PREVIOUS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** An early morning espresso; a fisherman repairing his net; Capri lies just off the Sorrentine Peninsula; Capri's crooked, cobbled paths offer some fantastic walking tracks across the island  
**THIS PAGE FROM LEFT:** Ingrid Bergman and daughter Jenny Lindstrom visit Capri in 1957; sunbathing on the rocks is a typical Capri pastime; Kris Jenner and Kim Kardashian stop for a gelato; Capri's elegant windows; the view from the bay of Naples; actress Kiera Chaplin and Attilio Brillembourg shop on Capri; lobster by the bay  
**FOLLOWING PAGE, CLOCKWISE:** White villas overlooking the marina; aperitivo in Anacapri; beautiful vases for sale in Capri; Italians navigate the island on a vespa



In between the whitewashed buildings and the endless sea, the sun begins to set on Capri, painting the sky in extraordinary shades of crimson and violet



"Sure, this island can be touristy but if you look beneath the surface, the real Capri is still here."

Whispered among the local Capriots is the tale that Roman emperor Augustus commanded Capri serve as his private estate after the island – once attached to the Sorrento Peninsula on Italy's mainland – broke away into the Tyrrhenian Sea. In the 19th Century, the island resort came into fashion with the world's elite and has stayed firmly implanted in their consciousness ever since.

"It's a certain type of holiday you have in Capri," admits Gigi as we join six of his friends – an eclectic bunch of designers, medical researchers, dentists and writers – around an old wooden table in his garden for a summer *grigliata* (barbeque). "But Capri is still the most beautiful island in Italy," he insists, pulling off a cactus paddle from a nearby tree and dropping it on the sizzling stove.

"I want to set up some murals around this place; it's an artist's haven," he continues, ignoring the helicopter roaring overhead – no

doubt on its way to drop one of the island's glamorous guests off at one of Capri's luxurious penthouse suites – and instead admiring the mountain butterflies flapping around the table.

"I've been coming to Capri for years," agrees Chiara, a dentist who's come over from Naples for the weekend as she drizzles olive oil over thick slices of warm bread. "You can come for a short break, just to fill your eyes with beauty. Italians like beautiful things. There is nothing ugly here... you arrive and everything is picture perfect."

**When the lazy afternoon turns** into evening, I decide to follow the La Scala Fenicia – 1,000 winding stone steps built in Phoenician times to unite rugged Anacapri with Capri's main port – some way down the mountain. Hundreds of feet above the Mediterranean, we pass Anacapri's tiny piazzetta, where wearied shopkeepers are sweeping the cobbled footpath ahead of the next day of business.

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The panoramic path leads to Via Camerelle, where I join the jet-set for a *passaggiata* on the island's most exclusive street. People watching is one of the best ways to pass time here. This season, it seems, is about big hair, Pucci kaftans and Capri's world-famous sandals – preferably those made by a Capriot cobbler outside his very own shop.

I keep walking, now towards Punta Tragara, the island's furthestmost point. In between the rows of whitewashed buildings and the endless sea, the sun begins to set on Capri, painting the sky in extraordinary shades of crimson and violet.

Finally I arrive. Capri is not short on cultural events and tonight a classical music concert being held in the island's carthusian monastery, Certosa di San Giacomo. Inside, a grand piano has been positioned between two oleander trees, whose fuchsia flowers are in

full bloom. As piano strains reverberate off the tall white walls, I catch the eye of a few familiar faces in the audience. Taking their place on the plastic chairs dotted throughout the cobbled courtyard are Gennaro and Anna Maria. Sammi and Jarred have also come along with a group of friends from Los Angeles. And behind them I see the fisherman, leaning against the monastery's white walls to hear Mozart's Symphony Number Five performed in one of the world's most spectacular locations.

As the bell chimes 10pm and the Mediterranean crashes onto the cliffs below, I surrender to the island's enchanting spell. Between some plastic chairs, a grand piano, lemon trees and olive groves, I see why people love Capri. The night is warm and the air is as sweet as ever. Here, I realise, there really is eternal spring. ☺

## EXPERIENCE ITALY

### FOR EATING: AURORA

Eating out is a favourite Italian pastime and Capri holds its own charms with the gourmet set. For fine dining and people watching, book a table at trattoria Aurora – the absolute epitome of Italian gastronomic heaven – on via Fuorlovido in Capri's historical centre. Counting Mariah Carey and Beyoncé Knowles as regulars, chef Franco Aversa – who prides himself on serving classic Neopolitan cuisine with a delicate Capri touch – must be doing something right.

[WWW.AURORACAPRI.COM](http://WWW.AURORACAPRI.COM)

### FOR SUNBATHING: CAESAR AUGUSTUS

Perched on a cliff with only a few natural beaches, Capri boasts one of the world's most impressive arrays of beach and pool clubs. The best vistas on the island can be found poolside at Caesar Augustus, one of Anacapri's luxurious five-star hotels. Join the high rollers and recline on a designer sun bed, preferably with a fresh flute of Dom Pérignon.

[WWW.CAESAR-AUGUSTUS.COM](http://WWW.CAESAR-AUGUSTUS.COM)

### FOR SHOPPING: CANFORA

No trip to the exclusive isle is complete without picking up a pair of Capri sandals – preferably made just for you. The best bejewelled leather sandals on the island come from Canfora on Via Camerelle. Slipping a bronzed foot into one of their sandals, it's easy to see why Maria Callas, Sofia Loren, Humphrey Bogart and Jackie Kennedy are counted amongst their illustrious clientele. Italian artisan chic never looked so good.

[WWW.CANFORA.COM](http://WWW.CANFORA.COM)

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