

Postcard from... NAPLES



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Galleria
Umberto

Hey everyone!

Some people climb mountains, others hike to the tops of buildings, but all I'd done to catch a glimpse of the magnificent view in front of me was open the doors to the balcony of our Naples hotel room! 'It's amazing,' I breathed, stepping into the warm May sunshine.

My husband Phil, 33, had been to this beautiful part of Italy before, but I'd always wanted to see it for myself, and now I was – in the best way possible. We were staying at the Grand Hotel Santa Lucia, and it certainly lived up to its name with rooms like this.

'Look at this view!' I cried, flinging open my arms.

'Great, isn't it?' he smiled.

He pulled me towards the railing and started pointing out the local sights. 'That's Castel dell'Ovo over there,' he nodded towards the building beyond the little harbour opposite our hotel.

'Isn't ovo Italian for egg?' I asked, remembering what I'd read up on in the guide book.

'Yeah,' he smiled. 'And legend has it that Latin poet Virgil placed an egg in a cage in the castle's dungeons, and that's where it got its name.'

'Why on earth did he do that?!' I asked.

'Well, it needed to go in a safe place because the story goes that if the egg gets broken, the castle and city are doomed to destruction!' explained Phil.



Pompeii and Mount Vesuvius



Piazza del Plebiscito



Me and Phil

'Talking of eggs, I'm hungry!' he added, winking. 'Let's get some lunch, then have a look about.'

After lunch, we strolled along to Galleria Umberto, a huge glass-roofed shopping arcade in the city centre.

'It was built between 1887 and 1891, and is named after Umberto I, who was king of Italy at the time,' said Phil.

'It's breathtaking,' I said, admiring the mosaic work on the floor in the centre of the mall, which houses more than 40 shops.

We then had a walk around the stunning Piazza del Plebiscito, which is enclosed on one side by the San Francesco di Paola – a church built on a model of the Pantheon in Rome.

Opposite is the 17th century Royal Palace. It's now a public building housing a theatre, museum, library and offices, but was once one of four residences of the Bourbon Kings of Naples during their reign from 1730 to 1860.

'I wouldn't mind working there with views like this,' I chuckled.

After all that walking, we decided to stop for a drink at Caffè Gambrinus, Naples' oldest café, which is just a stone's throw from the piazza. 'Oscar Wilde has drunk here,' Phil told me.

Hot drinks cost from 3 euros (£2.50), and a plate of three mini cakes costs 4 euros (£3.50).



A beach on Capri



The amphitheatre at Pompeii

Next, we headed back to our room to relax before dinner in the hotel restaurant.

The following day, we were up early to travel to the playground of the rich and famous – Capri!

We caught the hydrofoil from the port of Molo Beverello over to the glamorous island. One-way tickets cost 16 euros (£14) and the trip took about an hour.

'Let's get the bus up to the little village of Anacapri,' smiled Phil.

Jumping off the bus, we headed to Villa San Michele. The mansion has beautiful gardens and a stunning view of the sea. It was built at the end of the 19th century by Swedish physician Axel Munthe, who'd fallen in love with the island.

In Capri town, we walked past the designer shops towards the Gardens of Augustus, which boast a fantastic view of the coastline. 'The gardens were commissioned by German steel magnate Friedrich Alfred Krupp,' said Phil, reading the guidebook over my shoulder.

This really was where the rich came to splash their cash! But, without that kind of money to indulge ourselves with, we thought we'd immerse ourselves in history the following day instead.

Just a 35-minute journey from Naples is Pompeii, a Roman city frozen in time when Mount Vesuvius erupted and covered it in a thick layer of volcanic ash on

August 24, 79AD.

Excavation of the site began in 1748 and continued, on and off, until 1997. The excavation work was then scaled down so funds could be spent on maintaining

the buildings already exposed.

We entered the site through Porta Marina, an imposing gate in the city wall. Wandering around the cobbled streets, you really get a feel for the Roman way of life, and realise how similar it would have been to today's world.

'Look, there's a bakery,' said Phil, stopping at one of the ruins. We also looked around the baths, Roman homes and even a theatre.

After a busy day, we headed to Sorrento, and our hotel for the next two nights – the Imperial Hotel Tramontano. Italian poet Torquato Tasso was born in the building's west wing, and lots of writers have stayed there – Byron, Shelley and Keats to name just a few.

Floating platforms stretch out from the sea, and holidaymakers can hire sun loungers on them during the summer. There are a few steep paths down to the shore, or you can take the lift. 'We've got it all,' I sighed. 'Sun, sea, sand and...'

'Something to drink?'

'Good idea,' I laughed.

We hunted out a shop we'd read about in our guide book – Confetti e Agrametti – where they sell limoncello, an Italian lemon liqueur. The larger-than-life owner serenades all the women visitors. 'He looks as jolly as I feel,' I said after one – maybe two – limoncello.

And, to add to my good mood, we were offered almonds covered in a limoncello-flavoured sugar coating. *Delicious!*

'These are more-ish,' said Phil, picking up a couple of bags for relatives. And they won't have to wait long to try them because we head home tomorrow.

'Maybe we should stock up on pasta?' I said. 'Then I can recreate this fantastic holiday back home.'

'Let's squeeze all we can into our suitcase then,' Phil smiled. And we did!

Nic x

Nicola Warren, 30, Ipswich, Suffolk

The facts:

- We flew from Gatwick to Naples with BA. Return flights start from £97. Visit www.britishairways.com
- A double room at the Grand Hotel Santa Lucia, in Naples, costs from 150 euros (£130) per night. To book, visit www.santalucia.it
- On Capri, bus tickets cost 1.30 euros (£1.15) per ride or 6.70 euros (£5.90) plus 1 euro (90p) deposit for the whole day. There are two buses an hour between the marina and Anacapri, four an hour from the marina to Capri town, and four an hour between Capri and Anacapri. Tickets are available from kiosks.
- Pompeii is open all year round from 8.30am to 5pm, or 7.30pm between April and October. Entry costs 11 euros (£9.70), 5.50 euros (£4.90) for 18 to 24 year olds and is free for under-18s and over-65s. Visit www.pompeisites.org
- A double room at the Imperial Hotel Tramontano, in Sorrento, costs from 180 euros (£160) per night. Visit www.tramontano.it

Wish I'd known before I went...

Insider tips from those in the know:

- ✓ The Pompeii streets are uneven, so wear sensible shoes!
- ✓ The peak season is between June and September, but the area can be very hot in the summer months. Between April and June is an ideal time to visit.

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