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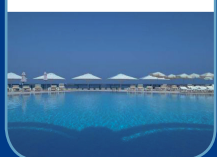
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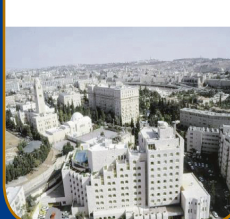


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LIFE TRAVEL

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Napoli ever after

S PAGHETTI DOESN'T grow on trees, but if it did, it would be at the Gragnano pasta factory. There are piles of the stuff everywhere, fresh from the mixer, hung up to dry and heaped on trays ready to be packaged and plated.

The smell of pasta — of Italy really — is in the air as chef Antonino explains in broken English the process of making the country's signature dish.

Food, of course, is one reason to visit the Naples coast, the birthplace of pizza. But it's far from the only one. Between the bustling



Chef Antonino:
pasta perfect

Jennifer Lipman goes local in Naples, Sorrento and Capri

metropolis of Naples and the sleepy streets of Sorrento, there are dozens of places to make camp. Naples offers several fine hotels and top-quality nightlife, but for a real break Sorrento, a small beach town, makes a better base.

Set high in the cliffs, Sorrento is a sprawling place where the pastel-hued, sun-dappled buildings appear almost as extensions

of their surroundings. The old town has narrow cobbled streets with flowerers and plants scattered about, Italian mamas hanging out washing on their balconies, and a generally languid feel.

Craft shops and cafés are everywhere and a short walk from town takes you to the old harbour, a place which could do with a touch of paint but is the better for not having it. You will see fishermen chattering on the rocks and on a clear day, panoramic views of Capri and the bay of Naples.

You could spend days just wandering about Sorrento, peering into old churches, trekking down the almost vertical path to the beach, lazing in the sun (temperatures reach 29 degrees in August). Still, take time to explore the wider area — Naples is around an hour by train, with stations in the centre of both towns.

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Dan Panorama	HB	770	705	705	770

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Sun-dappled Naples

Once there, wander round Piazza Garibaldi, take in the Galleria Umberto Naples with its wonderful, ornate glass roof, and watch out for the castles dotted around the city. Enjoy an espresso and some dolci – a trio of cakes – in the historic setting of the Gambrinus café or get there early to queue for the best margherita in town at the Pizzeria Gino Sorbillo.

Looming around Naples is Mount Vesuvius. Considered dormant, its last major eruption was 1944, but the Roman remains at Pompeii are a reminder of the volcano's might.

The AD 79 eruption devastated the area and wiped out its history, until excavations began in earnest in the 1860s. Two thirds have now been rediscovered, offering an unparalleled glimpse into a majestic civilization. It's essentially a vast ghost town; a place frozen in a moment of disaster. But the ghosts are so distant that you marvel at what they did rather than mourn their passing.

Aside from an absurdly placed café amidst the ruins, Pompeii is delightfully bereft of the usual museum paraphernalia, although it's a tour-



The mighty Mount Vesuvius

ist Mecca, so arrive early to beat the crowds. Rather than go with a guide, use the wonderfully detailed visitors book and wander at leisure to the villas still decorated with fragments of glorious friezes, the bakery where a loaf was unearthed, or to the forum to imagine the slave sales and public debates.

Children will relish the peculiar rituals of the Roman bathhouses and the gladiators, or seeing the notorious mosaic warning to beware of the dog. You might want to shield young eyes at the Lupanare with its fairly explicit wall drawings of what was on offer for the benefit of foreign guests.

Those dreaming of walking in the footsteps of the glitterati, among them Jackie Kennedy and Sophia Loren, should take an hour's boat ride from Naples or Sorrento to the island of Capri. Lavish hotels, restaurants, and designer shops dotted between those proffering souvenirs, but it's at the villa of Axel Munthe that you get a sense of how fabulous Capri was in its heyday.

The Red Cross founder made his home in the higher town of Anacapri a palace, filling it with Roman busts,

antique furnishings and a gorgeous garden for entertaining royalty.

Try the cable car to Capri's peak, or head to its bustling square for gelato in a heavenly fresh-baked waffle cone, followed by a walk to the Augustus Gardens for views of the lagoons below.

Around Sorrento are quaint hillside villages and beaches. Head to the quieter island of Ischia or find out what the Romans did for us at the Herculaneum ruins. You could see the area in five days without rushing, but ten wouldn't be too much.

And the food? It's fabulous. From rum-soaked baba cake; a regional delicacy to Pasta cooked to perfection, in every shape or style and creamy mozzarella served with fresh tomatoes sprinkled with local olive oil. There's plenty of fish too, including freshly caught sea bass. The Italians are wonderfully accommodating of vegetarians.

Finish your meal with at least a sip of limoncello, the signature drink of Neapolitans. Lemons and oranges are grown in the region and used for all kinds of liqueurs, sweets and cakes. I can still recall that wonderful citrus smell, the scent of a wonderful holiday.

GETTING THERE

Stay: Hotel Tramontano has doubles from £210 with breakfast (see review) www.hoteltramontano.it

Flights: British Airways fly daily from London Gatwick to Naples from £106 return. www.britishairways.com

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LIFE TRAVEL

HOTEL OF THE WEEK
IMPERIAL TRAMONTANO HOTEL, SORRENTO, ITALY

► “GO ON,” said the waiter. “Have a little gelato, just to clean the palate.” Of course, I did, and of course, it was delicious, the perfect end to a relaxed meal looking across the water to Capri and the bay of Naples.

Wedge into the cliffs as if it had developed naturally from its surroundings, if nothing else, the Tramontano hotel is worth a visit for the unparalleled views of the Sorrento coastline. A historic spot, the Tramontano was the birthplace of poet Torquato Tasso and erstwhile stomping ground of Keats, Byron and Ibsen.

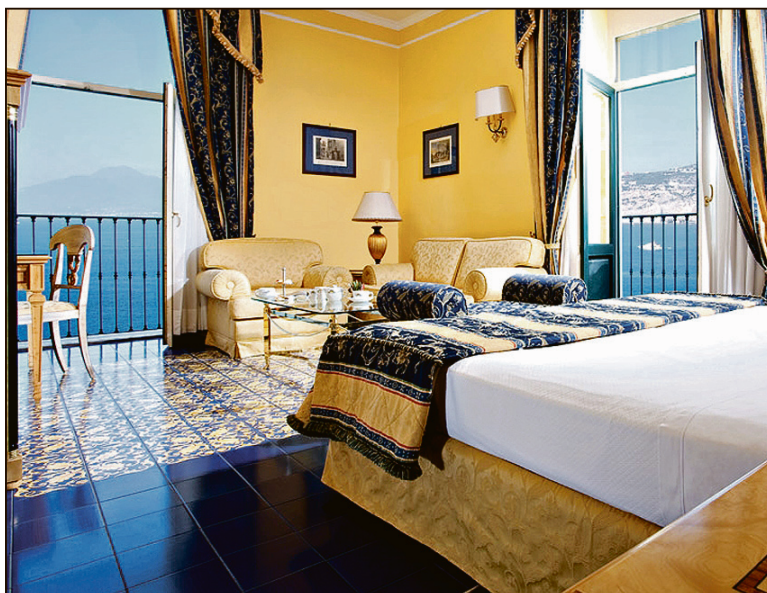
No doubt all were inspired by the stunning vista and the sound of the waves crashing furiously into the rocks.

A grand, almost palatial building with wide palm trees surrounding it and an elaborate drawing room inside, the hotel stops short of being gaudy and, instead, offers a whisper of the region's glamorous past.

The rooms include everything that you would need, with a tiled floor that offers a blissful respite during the heat of the day.

Do your best to secure one with a sea view because the balcony as the sun sets is a magical spot.

Less than five minutes from the cafes, shops and restaurants in the centre of the old town,



Secure a room with a sea view to enjoy a magical vista at sun set

and perhaps 15 from the marina below, the Tramontano is well located.

The swimming pool and terraces — a major plus in a town where the beach is rocky rather than sandy — do face the main road rather than the beach.

But aside from the sounds of a few mopeds zooming by, it's still a peaceful place to soak up the sun.

There would be little for children

to do, and for anyone who wanted constant email access the erratic wireless connection would be frustrating. Still, for pleasant rooms, sea views and friendly staff, you couldn't ask for more.

RATES: Doubles from £120, breakfast included
TEL: +39 081 878 25 88

JENNIFER LIPMAN

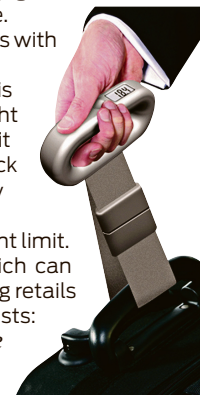
DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT...

► WITH EXCESS baggage charges on the increase, you could pay up to £7.50 per kg on short-haul flights and up to £30 per kg on long-haul flights.

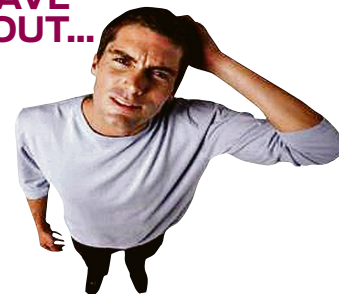
Many airlines are reducing luggage allowance, so keeping an eye on the weight of your luggage seems sensible. You could be meticulous about keeping what you pack to a minimum and hope for the best or weigh your baggage before you leave.

You can do this with a Salter luggage scale. The scale is compact and light so you can take it with you to check that your holiday purchases don't exceed the weight limit.

The scale, which can weigh up to 40kg retails at £19.99. Stockists: www.salterhousewares.com



DO LEAVE WITHOUT...



► TRAVELLING TO far-flung places may leave you feeling a little disorientated. How were you to know that in China making slurping or belching sounds while dining is a sign of appreciation?

Or that in Kenya you won't be served a drink because eating and drinking at the same time is impolite.

And how frustrating, when in India if they say “yes” while bobbing their head (a mixture between a shake and a nod), that “yes” generally means “no”. It's a communication style used as face-saving device.

Leave behind your preconceptions, do some research on the local culture so you know before you go and when you get there — vive la différence.

INCIDENTALLY...

► THE best deals on a no-frills airline are on mid-week flights when there is less demand to fly. If you must travel on the weekend, go Saturday to Monday instead of the ever-popular Friday to Sunday. At the very least book your flight in the middle of the week, since airlines often raise fares late on Friday only to lower them again on Monday morning if bookings were slow.

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