

# Town & Country

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SPECIAL ISSUE

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BEST**

**ENDURING  
PLACES**

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PLEASURES**

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TO 2003

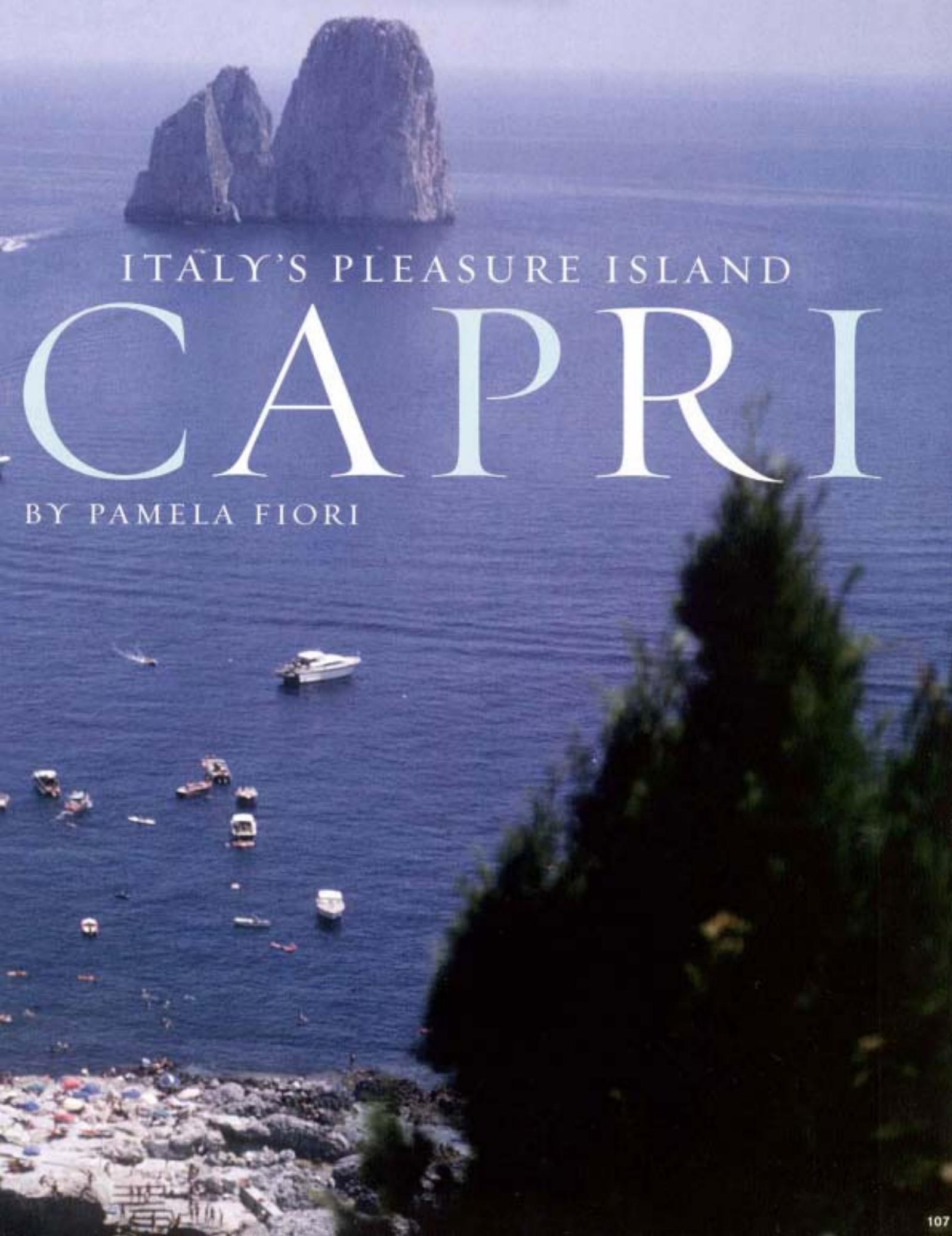
JANUARY 2003  
U.S. \$4.00 CANADA \$5.00  
FOREIGN \$5.00



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Capri's Marina  
Piccola, looking out to  
the Faraglioni rocks.

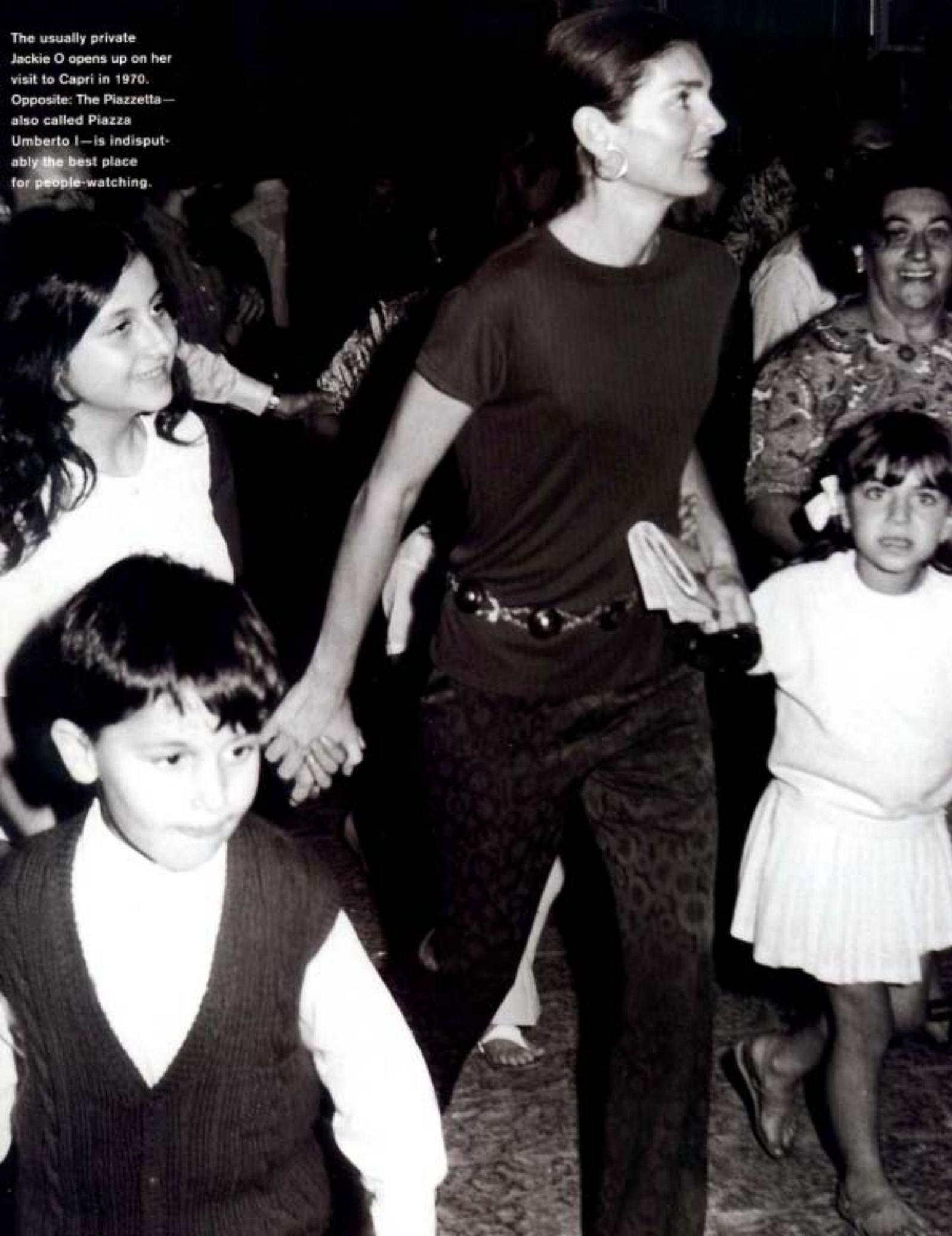


ITALY'S PLEASURE ISLAND

# CAPRI

BY PAMELA FIORI

The usually private Jackie O opens up on her visit to Capri in 1970. Opposite: The Piazzetta—also called Piazza Umberto I—is indisputably the best place for people-watching.





According to its rather sketchy history, the first humans arrived on the island of Capri some 400,000 years ago. They were probably tourists. And for good reasons: this gorgeous, seductive little island in the Bay of Naples has been serving up sunshine, sea air and sybaritic pleasures for almost all of its existence. It has been attacked, pillaged, plundered, invaded and admired by everyone from Ulysses to Aristotle Onassis. No other island on earth has been so desired or so sought after.

Caesar Augustus, the founder of the Roman Empire, first set his greedy eyes on Capri in 29 B.C. He decided, then and there, that he preferred Capri over its sister island, Ischia, which had been his private domain, and began to develop Capri. He built temples and villas, constructed aqueducts and

planted gardens so he could enjoy the island as his personal retreat. Emperor Augustus didn't realize it at the time, but he was creating what amounted to the world's first resort.

His successor, Tiberius, took up where Augustus left off. A man of lusty, sometimes sadistic appetites, Tiberius reportedly hosted the infamous Orgy of Capri and also had a penchant for tossing those he condemned into the sea—acts that were perceived even at the time as not particularly good for tourism, thus putting an end to Imperial Capri in the first century A.D.

That was then and this is now. Today Capri (pronounced "CAH-pree") still attracts those looking for paradise, or some reasonable facsimile thereof. It is as beautiful as ever—festooned with bougainvillea, lemon trees and jacaranda.



The many rock formations add mightily to the drama of the landscape. Grottoes, some of them visitable, provide secret hideaways.

But it is not nature alone that accounts for Capri's allure. First, there are the restaurants-many of them overlooking the water-where freshly caught fish, plump mozzarella *di bufala*, the ripest tomatoes, succulent figs and sweet cherries are on the daily menu and where the pasta is reliably delicious. Then there are the elegant boutiques, one after another. Some bear world-class brand names, like Prada, Loro Piana and Ferragamo. Others can be found only on Capri, such as 100% Capri, which sells fashionable, locally made linen apparel for men and women. In several shops, you can have a pair of leather sandals made in thirty minutes for about forty dollars-so you might as well buy two.

The Piazzetta, the tiny piazza beneath the clock tower in the center of town, is where several outdoor cafés are clustered. In summer, of a late afternoon or early evening, it sometimes gets so crowded with people sipping espresso and slurping *granita di caffè* that it is hard to tell where one café begins and another ends. Other than small delivery vehicles, there are no cars on Capri, at least not in the main part, so almost everything is reached on foot.

In the hills above the village of Capri is Anacapri, the quieter part of the island, where more and more wealthy Italians (such as Diego della Valle, who owns Tod's and Hogan) stay; some of them are restoring *castelli* or building houses. Several good hotels, including one of the island's best, the Capri Palace Hotel and Spa, are located here, and cars are permitted.

That Capri has remained so popular and has drawn afi-

cionados from all over the planet-from Jackie C) to Oprah Winfrey-says a great deal about its staying power and its power to please. In the 1950s, Capri gave rise to the expression *dolce far niente*. Loosely translated, it means "it is sweet to do nothing," and the *Caprese* take this very seriously. In July and August, the days are long and are spent in luxuriant relaxation .

If you want to work, go elsewhere. This is not an island where megadeals are made or where complicated negotiations take place; indeed, the most important activity is deciding where and what to eat for lunch or dinner. If you want to play, it will be of the gentle kind-a swim, a stroll, a visit to one of several historic sites. Leave your golf clubs at home and take it easy.You'll feel removed from the travails of so-called real life.

Being on an island helps. It is not easy to get to, and there are no airports. You must first go to Naples, then take a hydrofoil. Of course, that doesn't discourage masses of tourists from coming in high season, mostly on day excursions from Naples or the Amalfi coast. But they arrive by boat in the morning and leave after lunch (which in Capri means at about three or four in the afternoon). By sundown, the light is soft, the air is sweet and the day-trippers are well on their way to wherever. It is then that Capri becomes irresistibly romantic .

Resorts come and go. The best of them- St-Tropez , Mykonos, Portofino, St. Bart's, Nantucket, the Vineyard--have remained in favor and in fashion. But Capri is in a league of its own. It is the kind of place that sticks in your mind and gets under your skin, This is undoubtedly why so many loyalists return year after year. There have been imitators, but no substitutes. So let it be said here and now: there is one and only one Capri, and it is forever.

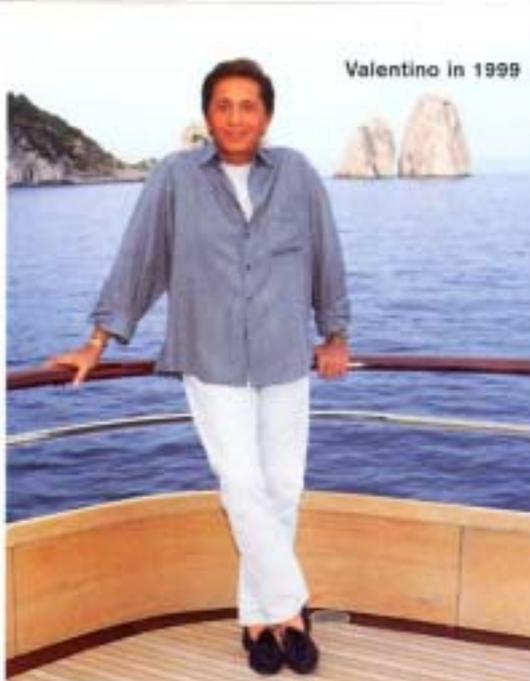
This page: One of several seaside restaurants in the Marina Piccola. Opposite: At the Lido del Faro, sunbathers roost—and roast—on the craggy shore.



At the Capri Palace  
Hotel & Spa



Valentino in 1999



Add'o Ricci  
seafood pas



The Faraglioni  
in silhouette



Audrey Hepburn and  
Mel Ferrer in 1955



The freshest produce



Maria Callas,  
1957



Poolside at  
Punta Tragara



Rock Hudson  
and friends, 1959



A typical gelateria

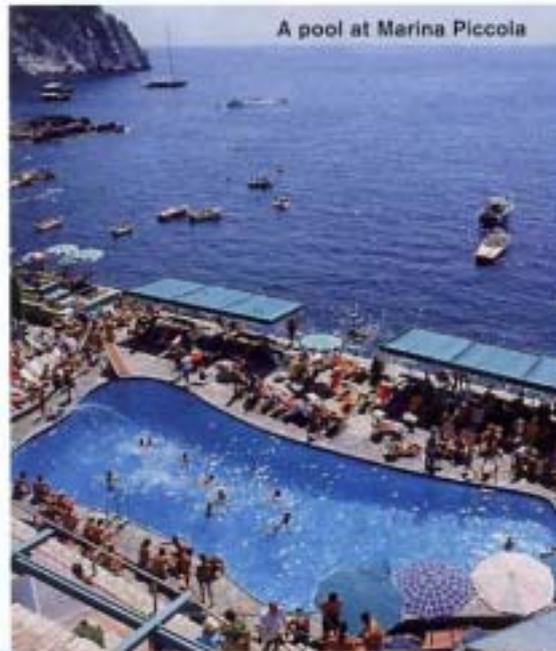
Roberta Capua  
at the Lido del Faro



Pia Lindstrom with  
her mother, Ingrid  
Bergman, 1957



A pool at Marina Piccola



Piazzett-Ing



Marina Piccola's cabanas

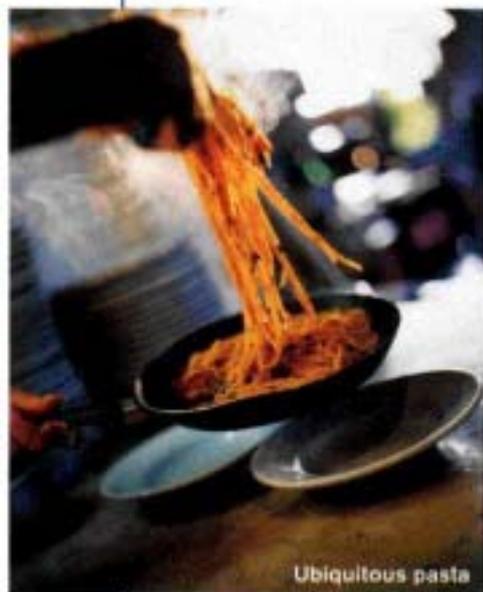


## TAKING IN CAPRI

High season is July and August. Better times to go are May, June and September, which are far less crowded. Dress is resort casual, but *molto* chic: T-shirts, Capri pants, Pucci and Gucci, sandals and espadrilles. It is still fashionable to cultivate a deep tan on Capri; just ask the designer Valentino, whose yacht is often anchored off the island. **Getting There:** Fly, drive or take a train to Naples. You can also reach Capri from Sorrento. Go directly to the port and take the hydrofoil to Capri (buy your ticket at the booth first). The ride lasts about an hour. In bad weather, the waters can get choppy, so be prepared. Make arrangements in advance with your hotel to be met at the Marina Grande, the main port of Capri, so your luggage can be properly delivered. Say good-bye to your luggage and take a taxi to the Piazzetta (formally called Piazza Umberto I); you'll walk from there to your

hotel. (By the time you check in, your luggage will probably have arrived.) If you are staying in Anacapri, a taxi can take you and your luggage together. By the way, many of the taxis are convertibles. **Hotels:** The longtime classic is the five-star Grand Hotel Quisisana, right in the middle of it all. It is big (150 rooms), full-service, well run and bustling in high season. Good for families. One of the best suites is No. 516, with spectacular views. The owners of the Quisisana, the Morgano family, have two much smaller hotels that many prefer but that are hard to get into: the Scalinatella, which serves a terrific alfresco lunch, and, right next door, Casa Morgano. Another good one is the Punta Tragara, at the tip of Via Tragara overlooking the famous Faraglioni rocks. The second top-rated hotel on the island, high up in Anacapri, is the Capri Palace Hotel & Spa. Some of the rooms and suites have private pools, and the spa is excellent. Of all the good hotels in Capri, the Capri Palace has the most contemporary style and is beautifully decorated. **Restaurants:** Everybody has favorites, and there are plenty of options for so small an island. Here are a few standouts:

Da Luigi, La Cantinella, La Fontelina, La Capannina, Pizzeria Aurora, Le Grotte (best chicken on the island) and Villa Verde are all in Capri itself. For finer fare, try Ristorante da Tonino. Da Paolino, situated in a lemon grove, is divine. In the Marina Piccola, there are several places, all with views of the sea, but the most famous are Ciro and La Canzone del Mare, part of the famous old swimming club of the same name. In Anacapri, be sure to have lunch at Lido del Faro, which is near the island's lighthouse and overlooks a rather rocky swimming area, where daredevils dive into the sea from the cliff. The most elegant restaurant is L'Olivo at the Capri Palace, a wonderful setting for an intimate dinner. Three other good ones are Add'o Riccio (great spaghetti with clams), Il Cucciolo and Da Gelsomina. **Sightseeing:** Villa Jovis is the most lavish of Tiberius's villas; Villa San Michele, the former residence of Axel Munthe, a Swedish doctor and author, is now a museum. Monte Solaro, the highest point on Capri, can be reached by a chairlift (if you are feeling hearty, you may also walk to and from the summit). If you absolutely must, take a boat ride to the Grotta Azzurra, or Blue Grotto, the most touristy thing to do on Capri. **Shopping:** Fendi, Ferragamo, Gucci, Pommellato, Loro Piana, Brioni, even Hermès—they're all here. Via Camerelle is the Rodeo Drive of Capri. Between the Piazzetta and the Quisisana are also great little places, including the store where you can have your leather sandals made. It is on the left side, steps away from the Quisisana's entrance, and looks like an old-fashioned cobbler's shop (don't ask for Geppetto). One of the most charming entries is 100% Capri—two boutiques, one for men and one for women, opposite each other. They have wonderful linen apparel, designed and made on the island. Capri's most revered jewelers are Alberto e Lina, Chantecler and Desiderio.



Ubiquitous pasta

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Antonino Aiello at his shop, 100% Capri

A spectacular view from  
the balcony of Villa  
Tirrena, the Ferragamos'  
home on Capri.

