

ITALIAN *persuasion*

Lemon groves, Michelin-starred restaurants and bijou hotels are among the allures of Italy's Amalfi coast, writes Maria Pasquale. And then there are the dreamy views...

The drive from Naples to Amalfi isn't for the faint-hearted. The locals are known for adventure, and how they take to the road is no different. But you forgive them. They live in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius - the volcano that once turned Pompeii to ashes, and it's the very reason the Neapolitans live like there's no tomorrow.

As we leave the city, the coast appears. Whitewashed villages, lemon groves and glittering water. This part of Italy is the thing of films and postcards. I concentrate on the road as we make hairpin turns on the cliff edges. The altitude makes your ears pop. I'm back for the first time in 15 years. Italy has changed, the world has changed. But this panorama hasn't. It's a comforting anchor in times of uncertainty. Beauty will save us, and this place has plenty to go around.

Before long I am at the new Borgo Santandrea hotel, the bell-boys have done their jobs, and I'm sipping on a lemon-infused drink on the terrace of dreams.

Owner and general manager Maurizio Orlacchio welcomes me, saying: "Borgo Santandrea is born from an exciting and ambitious dream of two hotelier families - mine and the De Siano family. We share a love for, and knowledge of, the world of hospitality that transcends generations." I can feel it. I'm in a special place.

Borgo Santandrea is the first hotel to open in Amalfi in more than a decade, and it's worth the wait. Here, mid-century design meets Mediterranean in





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01 Breakfast is served on Borgo Santandrea's Alici terrace © Umberto D'Aniello 02 One of the spectacular suites at the same hotel © Umberto D'Aniello 03 Take in the stunning coastal views from the hotel 04 Fine dining at the hotel's La Libreria 05 The same restaurant's immaculate cuisine unites style and substance

a striking yet soothing way; a curated mix of vintage and contemporary styles including bespoke design pieces featuring 30 patterns of spectacular geometric tiles. All rooms have sea views; some have private pools.

Speaking of, after a dip in the hotel's cliff-edge pool, it's time for lunch at the beach restaurant. I feast on raw scampi and tuna and the Neapolitan classic of pasta *patate e provola*. This heart-warming dish combines mixed pasta shapes, potato and provola cheese. It's five-star dining, yet beachside casual.

As the sun sets, the sea views from La Terrazza Bar perfectly accompany my aperitivo. Gastronomy at Borgo Santandrea is an always lavish affair, between the magical terrace at Alici, fine-dining La Libreria and the Wine Cellar, with its sommelier-guided tastings.

On the terrace, executive chef Crescenzo Scotti's menu is inspired by his southern Italian roots. Like the *gambero rosso*, raw pink Mazara prawns with buffalo mozzarella, lemon-infused

escarole, black olives and tomato confit. Or the *bavette* pasta with Monaco provolone cheese and zucchini. And sweet endings like the Neapolitan rum-soaked *babà*.

The next morning, breakfast is served quite literally in Scotti's kitchen. *Sfogliatelle* pastries, fruits, and cakes fill artisan ceramic plates. I eat on the terrace and look up, down and around. The Amalfi Coast meanders its way into your heart filling you with warmth and the promise of a new day. Yes, it's a tourist drawcard, but it's equally a gastronome's delight. The views, atmosphere and hospitality of Borgo Santandrea will make you long for this destination well after you leave. But for now – it's time to explore.

Amalfi classics

For views across the bay, the luxury Santa Caterina Hotel is home to Glicine, a one-Michelin-starred establishment with a stunning wisteria-draped terrace. Chef Giuseppe Stanzone delights by



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06 Borgo Santandrea's pool with a view © Adrian Gaut 07 Dreamy days at the same hotel 08 Chefs hard at work at La Libreria 09 Cuisine at La Libreria



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showing off Mediterranean produce in standout dishes like grilled scampo with buttermilk, chard, finger lime and lightly spiced 'nduja sausage crumble.

Ristorante La Caravella is cultural dining at its best. In 1959, this Amalfi gem – which aptly describes itself as a museum – was the first in south Italy to debut in the Michelin guide. The senses and palate are stimulated, not only by the food but also the ceramics and ancient artifacts that surround in this former 12th-century regal palazzo.

Ancient traditions

Many ingredients and techniques from the Roman Empire are absent in the modern world, but gave birth to iconic Italian products. Like ancient garum, a fermented fish sauce that yielded *colatura di alici*, famously produced in Cetara. Locals know that Pasquale Torrente's Al Convento is where you must try it served with spaghetti. It's housed in a former Franciscan

monastery with 17th-century frescoes, where you can enjoy the laid-back atmosphere on the terrace. For an organic wine tour or private vineyard picnic, don't miss Le Vigne di Raito in the ceramics town of Vietri sul Mare.

Dining room with a view

Zass restaurant at Positano's historic Il San Pietro hotel is surrounded by bougainvillea and distracting views. A Michelin star was awarded for the kitchen's commitment to sustaining local growers, cultivating its own produce and plating it with chef Alois Vanlangenaeker's culinary prowess. Highlights include sea bass carpaccio with red beetroot, caviar and black garlic, and homemade tagliatelle with lemon, lobster and pistachios. Match with wines – there are more than 600 labels in the cellar.

A trip to this part of the world isn't complete without visiting the resort town of Ravello, known for its

villas and gardens, but loved for its position 350 metres above sea level. Positano might be glamorous, but Ravello breathes of nobility. The former hangout of playwrights, musicians, lords and aristocrats is home to many hotels, including legendary (and pink) 12th-century Palazzo Avino. Visit its one-Michelin-starred Rossellinis for lobster done three ways.

Island hop

A coastal stay is made perfect with a day trip to Capri, where Australian Holly Star and her Caprese husband Gianluca D'Esposito of Michel'angelo offer bespoke and sustainable culinary activities. Think private garden dining in their Anacapri villa or making *torta caprese* and limoncello in a tailored cooking class. There are gourmet hampers for your cruise or pimped-up picnics in secret spots around the island. They'll pick you up in private transportation at the port. All you need to do is arrive hungry. ♦