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CHRISTMAS MARKETS CRUISES

CAPRI'S CAPTIVATING RETREAT

A BOTSWANA SAFARI

Villa Marina, Capri

BY PAMELA MCCOURT FRANCESCONI

Villa Marina, a sprawling, early-1900s private home, is just three minutes up the zigzagging road from Capri's main port of Marina Grande, where thousands of visitors spill out of ferries, hydrofoils

and private yachts every day during the high season. We were picked up by the hotel shuttle and checked-in under a perfumed pergola in what, for Capri, is an extremely large garden. It is, without

a doubt, the most beautiful hotel garden on the island with its lawns, palm and lemon trees, rose arbors, heated swimming pool, solarium deck and beautiful views over the Mediterranean.

The 21 twin and double rooms and suites are all different, have either sea or garden views, and are named after famous artists, writers and celebrities who in the 1900s put Capri on the map as the

VILLA MARINA offers a 32,292-square-foot garden, with beautiful lawns, palm and lemon trees, rose arbors and views over the Mediterranean sea.



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THE SWIMMING POOL and the sundeck are surrounded by the hotel's lush park, with seating, chaise lounges and hammocks.



THE GARDEN PRESTIGE SEA SIDE SUITES range from 410 to 430 square feet in size and come with a private terrace.

world's swankiest island. From Pablo Neruda to Gorky, and from the German steel baron Alfred Krupp, whose Via Krupp hairpin footpath down the rocky cliffside is one of the island's showpieces (it is due to reopen this summer after repairs), to the Swedish writer Axel Munth who built the beautiful Villa San Michele — a must-do — in Anacapri which is the island's second largest town.

Most rooms have either showers or bathtubs, but the Prestige Sea Side Neruda, No. 102, has a shower and a handicap bath, and Nos. 102, 202, 207 and 302 also have both showers and baths. Others have showstoppers like our Douglas Suite Sea View, No. 302, with an XL black mosaic sunken bath (and a shower), and the Munthe, No. 304, with a green marble bathroom and

a bath with a sea view. We particularly liked the four Sea View Suites that open onto patios, and for families, Garden Prestige Sea Side No. 106 and Garden Suite Sea Side No. 107 connect to sleep up to five.

Top Tip: The three Sea View Pool Suites are your best choice if you have A-listers who like to jump out of bed and straight into their private pool. Federica Guarino (marketing@villamarinacapri.com), marketing manager, the youngest generation of the family that still owns the property, told us the La Castello Suite, which will open next year on the highest level, will have a master bedroom, a library and a garden with a private pool. All guests find a bottle of champagne in their room when they arrive.

The Stai Spa has a heated pool, sauna, Turkish bath and two treatment rooms. Spa managers Rodica Olarescu and Mirella Pollio (stai.spa@villamarinacapri.com) said their four-hands massage is very popular, that guests



GUESTS can enjoy apéritifs in the Pool Bar, above, or cocktails and long drinks made from a selection of spirits, whisky and liqueurs at the Aria Bar, below.





MINIBARS are a feature of most of the suites at Villa Marina, Capri.

can reserve the entire area, and that the signature treatment is the *Rituel Nourissant Après-Soleil* developed by the French eco-luxury line *Cinq Mondes* exclusively for Villa Marina. Guests can also use the small covered open-air fitness area.

The Ziqù Restaurant, which is also very popular with non-residents, has a shaded area and tables under lemon trees in the garden. It is helmed by Chef Manuele Cattaruzza (ziqu.kitchen@villamarinacapri.com) who has worked in stellar kitchens from *Le Cirque* in New York to the *Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park* and *Le Gavroche* in London. Need we say more? His masterful use of local ingredients like the Campania region's luscious mozzarella cheese and fresh seafood, married to the Instagrammable artistry of his plating,



THE ZIQU RESTAURANT, helmed by Chef Manuele Cattaruzza, has a shaded area and tables under lemon trees in the garden and is also popular with non-residents.



make this one of the very best restaurants on Capri.

After Tiger Prawns with Beetroot and Avocado, then the Traditional Ricotta Cheese Ravioli (Capri's signature dish) and Beef Cheek with Black Truffles, we ended on a high note with a Soft Carrot Biscuit with Salted Almond and Ginger Ice Cream and a Cold Apple Infusion which had awesome layers of flavor. Eduardo Apostolo, the restaurant manager, said the Ziqù Bar under a pergola in the garden can be reserved for small private parties, and the Viva Bar is a relaxed indoor area with comfortable seating, also in the garden.

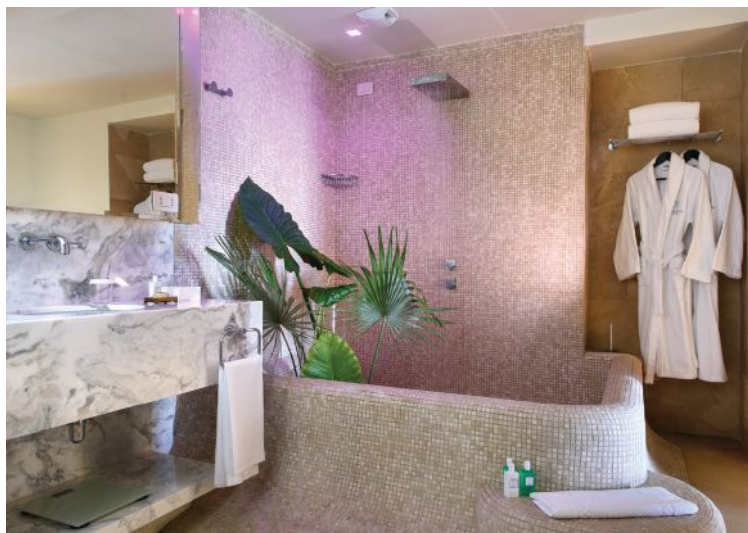
General Manager Giada Falanga (gm@villamarinacapri.com) says VIPs have included Heidi Klum and Cindy Lauper. Falanga also says that rooms can be booked through Synexis, and for the peak months of July and August, it is recommended to book as early as possible. "As a boutique hotel in high demand our rooms tend to fly off the shelf for the summer months, and it is certainly easier to find

ad-hoc availability in April or in October." The property opens annually in April and closes late October at the end of the season.

Bianca Staiano (fom@villamarinacapri.com) is the front desk manager who arranges transfers and guided visits to historic sites like Villa San Michele and Villa Jovis, the ruins of one of Emperor Tiberius's 12 residences on the island. She said that guests like to take Anacapri's 13-minute chairlift to the top of Mount Solaro for the breathtaking 360-degree views, and that the beach at Marina Grande is just five minutes away with the hotel shuttle.

Staiano also stressed that no visit to Capri is complete without a boat trip around the island to admire its rocky coast, the famous Faraglioni stacks and to experience the island's most famous attraction, the Blue Grotto. Ask her to reserve tours or private craft for day trips also to Sorrento, the Amalfi Coast, Naples, Pompeii and Ischia.

Just seven minutes uphill by hotel shuttle in the island's main town of Capri we people-



THE STAI SPA, here and above, has a heated pool, sauna, Turkish bath and two treatment rooms.

watched on the little Piazza Umberto 1 square, aka as La Piazzetta where the rich and famous, from Jackie Kennedy and Brigitte Bardot to more recent celebs like Leonardo di Caprio and Jennifer Lopez, have all been spotted. For shopping there are international luxury brands on nearby Via Camerelle, but for unique Caprese craftsmanship go to Anacapri, which is situated on

the upper part of the island.

Anacapri has a heliport and also Carthusia, the body and home fragrances store with Capri's famous perfumes which were first made in 1380 by the monks in the San Giacomo Charterhouse. Another must-stop for mementoes is Masterpiece which has a range of bijouterie, charms and bracelets with the little campanelline goat's bells that are the symbol of the island. ■