



# COAST

Former models with a new look

ORANGE COUNTY'S FINER LIFESTYLE | SEPTEMBER 2009

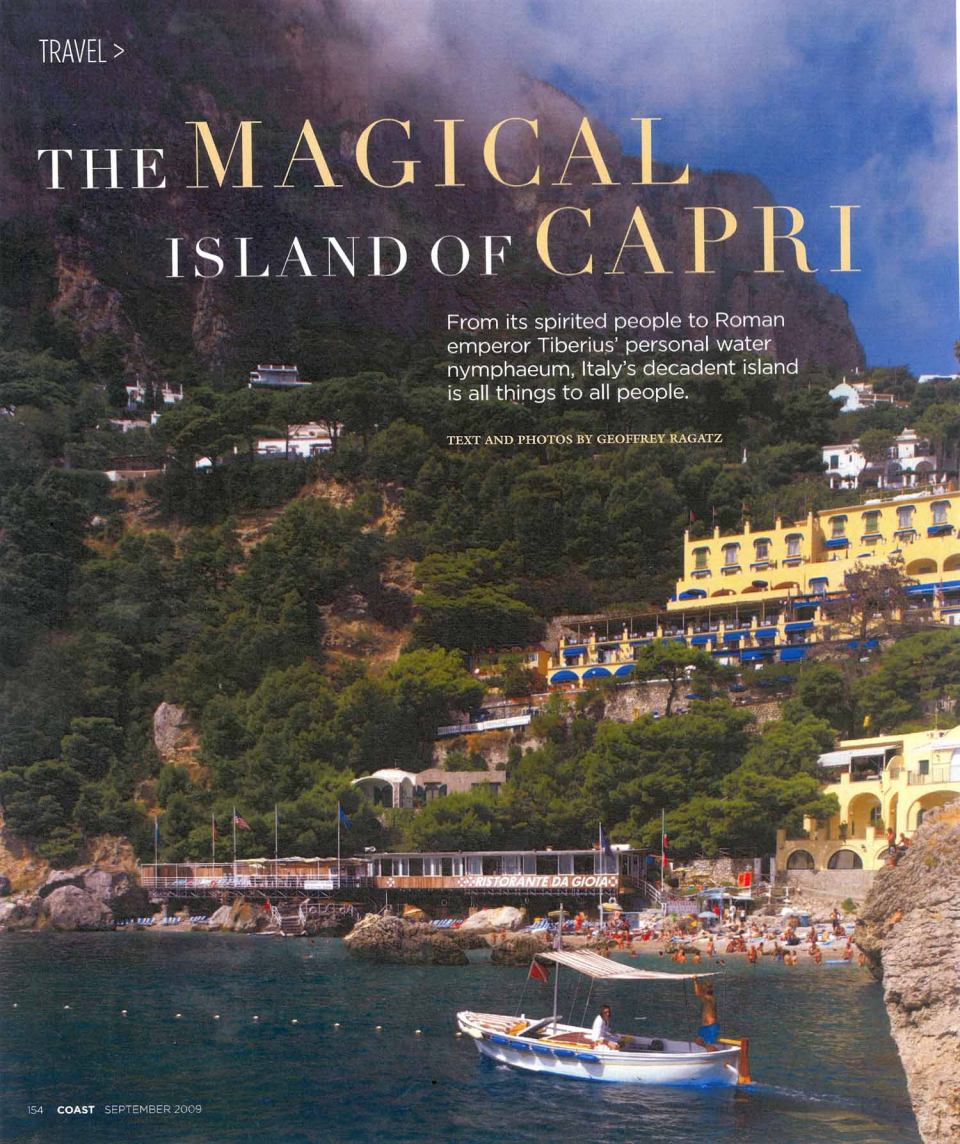
A black and white photograph showing a person from the side, wearing a dark jacket, standing next to a very large, dark-colored dog, likely a Mastiff. The dog is looking towards the camera. The background is dark and blurry, suggesting an indoor setting at night or in low light. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

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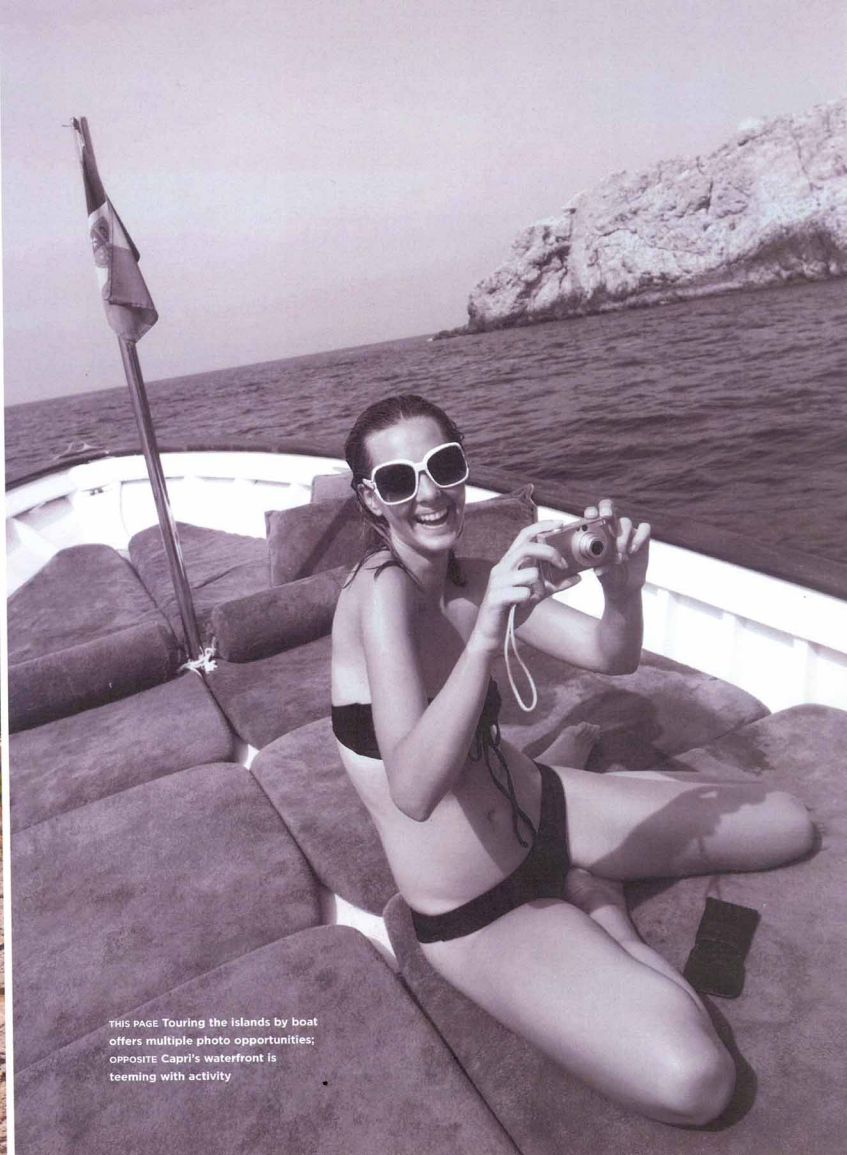
# THE MAGICAL ISLAND OF CAPRI

From its spirited people to Roman emperor Tiberius' personal water nymphaeum, Italy's decadent island is all things to all people.

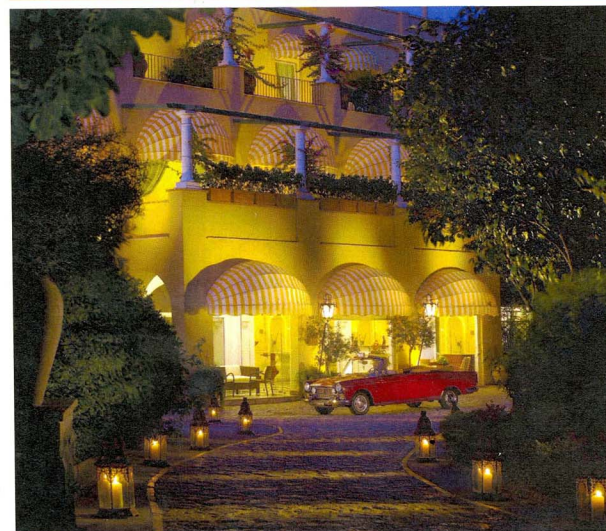
TEXT AND PHOTOS BY GEOFFREY RAGATZ







THIS PAGE Touring the islands by boat offers multiple photo opportunities; OPPOSITE Capri's waterfront is teeming with activity



Capri soars straight out of the Mediterranean, its vertical rock façade and green slopes shrouded in floating cumulus clouds as the morning light warms the port of entry with its fevered pace of arrivals and departures.

Needless to say, Capri is a popular place, even in early September when “the season” is supposedly winding down. But within minutes of arriving, a representative from the **Hotel Caesar Augustus** has me en-route, bypassing Capri town proper toward the highland village of Anacapri. The view is spectacular – that is, until I’m staring down an immediate 1,000-foot drop, the small two-lane road we’re on more or less being bolted to the side of a vertical rock face.

It was with great anticipation that I arrive on the footsteps of the Caesar Augustus. As a majority of the destinations in Capri town itself are boutique hotels, the wide open landscape and scenic views of this luxurious property make quite an impression.

It doesn’t take long for my pool relocation program to begin. The warm wind rolling off the Mediterranean lulls me into a blissful nap; I think I’m dreaming when I realize that Rick Springfield is actually in the chair next to me.

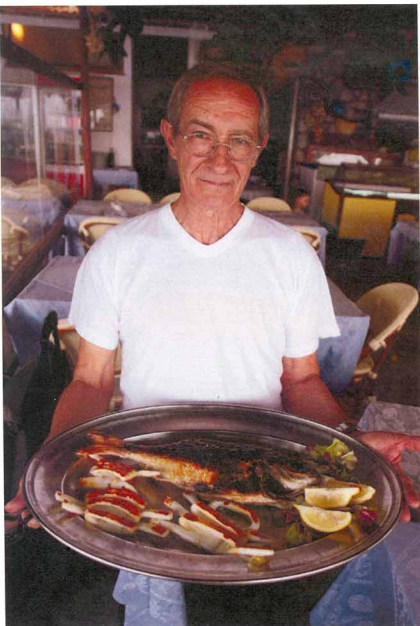
With all signs I’ve been traveling for the better part of a day washed away, my first night’s adventure involves a walk about town. The island of Capri is separated by the highlands, where the town of Anacapri and Hotel Caesar Augustus is located, and what could be considered the saddle, where the town of Capri itself plays host to a constant parade of travelers.

I make it a plan to visit the most storied of Capri’s destinations – the Piazzetta – center of the island and ground zero to all goings-on. I drop into the night patio scene conscious that this is the place to see and be seen, the high and not-so-high rollers cruising to and from their off-site villas flanking the single track trails about the hillsides. The masses are dressed to the nines: Dolce & Gabbana and all of their Italian designer brethren

**A guest room at the Hotel Caesar Augustus; twilight in the town of Anacapri; the grand entry to the Hotel Caesar Augustus; OPPOSITE Cocktails at the beachside village of Marina Piccola; biking through Capri town; the famous Caprese salad; exploring the blue grotto by boat**







**Capri-style dining; a storefront in Anacapri; The beachfront at a private cove; OPPOSITE Capri from the top; Italian style sunbathing**

would be proud as their designs are flaunted across the Piazzetta.

I am befriended by a wonderful artist named Carlos, in his mid-70s, who took up occupancy in Capri 30-something years ago. Each night thereafter we would meet in the Piazzetta and talk of his years in Capri. He speaks of the glamour of the old days, the lifestyle of the island and its openness to all people.

Capri's image overhaul in the 19th and 20th centuries came as a result of its international appeal as a place of refuge for many famous artists, writers, poets, and people of wealth and influence over the years. Entranced by the beauty of the environment and the warmth of the people, it's obvious that same *joie de vivre* exists today, though perhaps with a bit of commercial profiteering mixed in. "While it can be pretentious at times," Carlos tells me, "equally, the people, be they of privilege, of upper class or of mod-



est means, all come together and commune happily with one another. It is paradise!" Paradise in the Mediterranean, yes; a sociological transcendence of class and stereotype, I don't think so.

It was clear to see how Capri has become this sort of chic, utopian Shangri-La for those who've run away from their normal routine and made the island their permanent residence. From its flamboyant gay community that was accepted long ago to its transient artist colony from years past, not to mention the who's-hot-now celebrity hit list, it's little surprise that the mystic lure of Capri continues to this day.

That said, aside from the ultra-private rock grottos fronting the Mediterranean, everyone can get into most any venue for a price. And while there is probably little chance you'll be toasting Champagne with the Beckhams and Cruises of the world, if you want to feel like something special, you'll definitely be able to feel even more special for a price.

I quickly come to realize that in Capri, the question isn't one of what to do, but when to do it. There are enough activities to keep the most active of travelers occupied for a week, and I make sure to explore as many options as possible. From the unforgettable panoramic views found at the top of Mount Solaro to my near circumnavigation of Anacapri by foot and twice daily Vespa rides exploring not only Capri central and its various beachside watering holes, but the equally numerous archeological ruins of Roman ancestry, each day is full of discovery.

With only a day left, I have the honor of being hosted by Rebecca Brooks, an American expat who's now running a successful travel business called Capritime Tours. She arrived and never left, as so many that I met over the course of my stay do, and with that, she offers a full day tour of the island by boat. From the water, the landscape of Capri stands alone as one of its greatest attributes, and touring by boat allowed us to explore the numerous caves and water grottos hidden about the island. We swim through turquoise caves, have lunch and sip Champagne while drying beneath the bronzing rays of the Mediterranean sun. Then, in an inebriated state, we enjoy the adrenaline rush of cliff jumps topping 20-, 30-, 40-feet, and more.

And at the end of the day, as a good



Roman emperor would, we arrive at the infamous Grotta Azzurra. Arguably Capri's most famous feature, the "blue" grotto was once used by Roman emperor Tiberius as his own personal water nymphaeum. The surreal view from inside-out is transparent, like no cave I've ever experienced. In actuality, the underbelly of the cave is open to the exterior, allowing for a reflection of light to bounce up from under the water and into the cave. That light is then filtered by the water, which absorbs its red tones, leaving only the blue hues of the sea to pass through. Alone, after hours, having swum in the cave

by myself, I feel transported in time, Tiberius was on to something here – I mean, who in their right mind would think of a water nymphaeum? In retrospect, it makes complete sense.

My wish is Capri's command, a novelty and a reality all in one.

#### More Information

**STAY** Hotel Caesar Augustus, +39 081 83 73 395; caesar-augustus.com  
**SEE** Capritime Tours, +39 329 21 49 811; capritime.com