



TRAVEL

The Romantic “Isle of Capri”



By Richard Levy

Back in 1958 most Americans had never heard of Capri, but thanks to Frank Sinatra's huge hit song, “Isle of Capri,” this island off the coast of Naples became one of the world's most romantic places for Americans to go on vacation and the song became part of Frank's repertoire for the rest of his career:

*“T’was on the Isle of Capri
that I found her*

Beneath the shade of an old walnut tree
Oh, I can still see the flowers bloomin’
round her

Where we met on the Isle of Capri”.

Before “Old Blue Eyes” let the cat out of the bag, so to speak, Capri was one of the best-kept secrets of famous writers, world leaders, super-models, movie stars, European royalty and pretenders to various thrones. Emperor Augustus made Capri his hedonistic get-a-way and Tiberius retired here in AD 27. This island off the coast of Italy was also Bolshevik writer-revolutionary Max Gorky's retreat. (Lenin loved visiting Gorky's villa.) You can take your Maiden Aunt or your kid who just graduated high school to Capri and they'd

have a fabulous time as well.

Capri is surrounded by beautiful deep blue water that laps into its secluded coves and hidden grottoes. The island is dotted with luxurious villas, sprawling hillside vegetable plots, pastel colored, sun-bleached stucco homes and bougainvillea is everywhere. Old fishing boats sit side-by-side in the harbor with luxurious multi-million dollar yachts, speedy Hydrofoils and small cruise ships that shuttle back and forth to the mainland.

Take a dinner flight from NY to Rome. You'll arrive about 8AM and be in your hotel about 10AM. (Take a taxi into town, not the train.) Stay in Rome for your first night and consider staying at the lovely, boutique Hotel Fellini near the Fontana di Trevi. Don't unpack, just freshen up and change into something comfortable (Especially shoes) then head out to see Rome and all it's wonders. Take a taxi to the Coliseum (If you take a personal tour, you'll go to the front of the usual long line and this is expensive but worth it.)

Afterwards, walk over to the Forum and lose yourself in the history of the Roman Empire. Taxi over to the historic Piazza Navona and lunch at any



Isola di Capri, Campania District: Napoli Town: Capri Nature Copyright: Fototeca ENIT Photo by: Paola Ghirotti

of the outdoor cafes that ring the spectacular Bernini fountains. After lunch, wander over towards the historic domed Pantheon, built between 27 BC and 14 AD, still the largest dome ever built



Isola di Capri Region: Campania, District: Napoli Town: Capri Copyright: Fototeca ENIT Photo by: Paola Ghirotti



Capri: the Faraglioni, marvellous rocks ... Region: Campania District: Napoli Town: Capri ©Fototeca ENIT

2000 years later.

Nearby is the spectacular Fontana di Trevi, made famous by the movie and song, “Three Coins in the Fountain,” also popularized by, “Old Blue Eyes”. Throw three coins into the fountain for good luck and make a wish. (Your hotel is close by so crash for an hour before dinner.) Have dinner at La Rampa, my favorite outdoor restaurant in a small piazza not far from Spanish Steps. Start with their delicious fried artichokes, followed by vongole: baby clams over linguini.

The next morning take an express

train to Naples and then a taxi from the station to the harbor which is not far away. (*When your train arrives in Naples ignore the guys offering to “take your luggage” to the taxi: you'll never see them again.*) The speedy Hydrofoil boat will take you to Capri, as will the ferry, which is slower

Capri has three levels. The Harbor, Capri Town which you get to on a lovely fast Funicular right in the middle of the Harbor and at the top is beautiful Anacapri, where for centuries the rich and famous have had luxurious villas. The bus to Anacapri leaves every 15



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minutes from Capri Town or you can take a taxi.

A chairlift will take you to Capri's highest peak, Seggiovia del Monte Solaro in Anacapri, where you can see the Bay of Naples and the Amalfi Coast from the top; a short and scenic 12 minute ride. Then stop for lunch at any of the terraced restaurants. (They all have such a great views, you probably won't notice the delicious food.)

Afterwards head back down to Capri Town and stop for a drink at an outdoor café and enjoy people watching in Capri's most important square, Piazzetta. Stroll down the Via Camerelle, lined with cutting edge designer shops.

Have dinner at the fabulous Ristorante il Geranio. The lovely terrace has stunning views of the sea and of the two huge “Fraglioni di Capri” rocks rising out of the water. Order their salt-baked fish, it's unlike any fish you've ever eaten, or octopus salad and linguini with saffron and mussels.

Were to stay in Capri? There are three classic but pricey hotels, if you budget permits and they all offer spectacular accommodations. The Caesar Augustus Hotel in Anacapri is perched on a cliff and it is like staying in Heaven. The Capri Tiberio Palace is a 19th Century hotel near town. The J.K. Palace, an 1876 Villa with a great pool, is near the beach.

Historians might gravitate to the charming Villa Krupp, once owned by Max Gorky, who often entertained his old Bolshevik pal Lenin here. Gorky was a very famous Russian writer, a Marxist political activist and very close friend of Tolstoy and Chekov. The only negative is that there are a number of steps to navigate.

Ladies, bring fashionable stuff to wear in Capri, where it is always “casual dress-up time.” (No sweat suits here, please!) Buy yourself a fabulous designer bathing suit before you go. And guys, instead of wearing a long droopy bathing suit, buy something fashionable. I'm not talking “Speedos,” there are shorter boxer bathing suits. Splurge and buy what European guys will be wearing: a “Vilebrequin” French bathing suit, (\$250 at Blue Fly.com).

Be sure to visit the magnificent Villa San Michelle, then take the short path

over to the statue of the Sphinx facing the water. (Legend has it that if you pat the Sphinx's rear end with your left hand it will bring you good luck.) Have lunch up there in any outdoor places; they all have amazing views of the sea.

Take the bus down to Capri town and wander around and shop. As the sun sets, linger in a café and have dinner at the very fashionable La Capannina. Order the ravioli caprese or the squid ink pasta with local casiotta cheese.

The next day, get up early and take a taxi to the “Gratta Azzora” or Blue Grotto (you must get there before the day-trippers arrive.) Take a bus or taxi to Marina Grande, which is the departure point for boat tours for the Blue Grotto. Purchase a ticket for the complete circle tour that includes sailing through the arch in the dramatic Faraglioni rock formations. The Gratta Azzora a very unique sea cave illuminated by an otherworldly blue light and is Capri's most famous attraction. The Blue Grotto was discovered in 1826, but it was later learned that Emperor Tiberius built a quay in the cave around AD 30, complete with a nymphaeum. (An ancient Roman sanctuary consecrated to water nymphs filled with sculpture, plants, flowers, fountains, and paintings.) You can still see the Roman platform at the rear of the cave. Over time, the grotto has sunk 20 meters, blocking every opening except the high entrance to the cave and this is the key to the magical blue light. Sunlight enters through a small underwater aperture and is refracted through the water. This, combined with the reflection of the light off the white sandy seafloor, produces the vivid blue, almost mystical glowing effect to which the cave owes its name. Remember to spring for the more expensive boat tour package. Trust me, experiencing the blue water of the grotto is a lifetime experience you will never forget.

On your third day in Capri get up early and take a morning Hydrofoil to the spectacular former fishing village Positano for the day. Renowned as the crown jewel of the Amalfi Coast, Positano was made famous by John Steinbeck, Picasso, Stravinsky and others.

Wander all the way up to the top of the twisting and winding cobblestone



Torre dell'Orologio Naples - Clock Tower in Capri Region: Campania District: Napoli Town: Napoli ©Fototeca ENIT Photo by: Gino Cianci

main streets filled with fashionable boutiques, cafes restaurants and unique stores. Have lunch on the beach at my favorite restaurant, La Cambusa. Order their mixed seafood appetizer and grilled fish of the day then head back to Capri.

The next day sleep late and after breakfast hire a taxi for flat fee and take a scenic two-hour tour of the island's impressive villas and vistas. Have lunch someplace on a cliff overlooking the sea. (If you buy your driver lunch, he'll wait forever.) I really loved hiking around the island for a few hours. (Your hotel can you plan a scenic and not too difficult hike. They will also be happy to make you a lovely box lunch. Bring a bottle of wine and a corkscrew.)

Walk down the very long winding stone stairs to Capri's shoreline where you'll find some lovely hidden beaches: mini-beach clubs that charge only about 20 Euros for the day. (Ask your hotel for suggestions on which beach club to go to.) These are rocky not sandy beaches: weathered wide rocks with spectacular vistas with perfect places for lunch. Before dinner take a romantic sunset boat ride around the island.

Have dinner one night at the stunning Ristorante Faraglioni in Capri Town. You must order their fabulous, traditional dishes like spaghetti with crab and sea urchin sauce (to-die-for) and legendary lemon risotto. Their fish was probably swimming the morning they served it and you can

choose your lobster or crab from their fish tank.

On another day after breakfast, take an early ferry back to Naples, drop your bags at the Hotel de Chiaja, ask them to book you an afternoon tour of Pompeii. History lesson: In AD 79 Mt. Vesuvius erupted, covering the resort city of Pompeii with a mountain of ash. Modern excavations revealed that the people of Pompeii were instantly vaporized by the hot molten lava. (It's one of the most tragic, haunting and unforgettable places you'll ever visit.)

Upon your return to Naples have dinner at the infamous L'Antica Pizzeria da Michelle where Julia Roberts ate in the movie “Eat, Love, Pray”. The next day take an early morning express train back to Rome.

Whatever you do, don't come to Capri during July and August when it is over-run with wall-to-wall day-tripping tourists from Naples and Sorrento. The perfect time to come is during September or October; the tourists have gone, the weather is still gorgeous and the water is at it's warmest. Be sure to make reservations as early as possible. Another reason to book early is because the dollar is very strong now against the Euro. So I suggest not only booking now, but paying for your hotel in full now, this way you'll save 20% if when you arrive the Euro is stronger against the dollar.

Now I know all you romanticists are dying to know how Frank Sinatra's song “Isle of Capri” ends, so as not to disappoint you, here are the lyrics. They probably sound more corny than romantic these days, but don't forget, this song which helped make Capri “The Romance Capital of the World” was made popular back in 1958.

“She whispered softly, “It's best not to linger”

And then as I kissed her hand I could see

She wore a lovely meatball on her finger

“Twas goodbye at the Villa Capri”.

Only Frank Sinatra could ever get away with these lyrics, When you get back home and walk into your office on Monday morning looking tan and refreshed, be sure to announce boldly, “I just got back from Capri”. Then wait for the girls to exclaim, “Ohhhh Capri, it's soooooo romantic!” Buon Viaggio!!!