

the italian



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Smeralda in Sardinia

THE PEOPLE ■ THE PLACES ■ THE PASSION

magazine

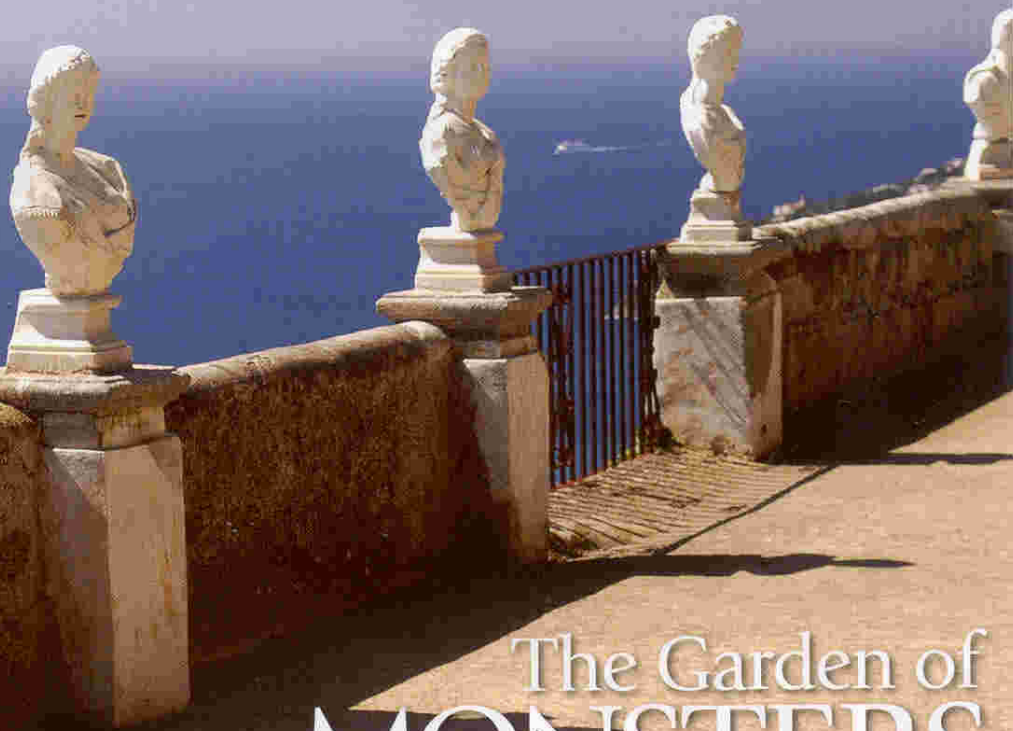
RAVELLO

Banish the winter blues and take a springtime break at this out-of-season Amalfi Coast gem

THE LAKES:
Affordable homes in this picture-postcard region

Beautiful BRESCIA

Discover this scenic region of hills and home cooking on Lake Garda's southern shores...



The Garden of MONSTERS

Explore the park whose monstrous inhabitants have been scaring the locals for centuries...



Plus! REAL LIVES: LE MARCHE & LAKE COMO
• 14 PAGES OF RECIPES • INVEST IN CENTRAL ITALY
• MAKE AN ITALIAN WILL • LE MARCHE IN WINTER



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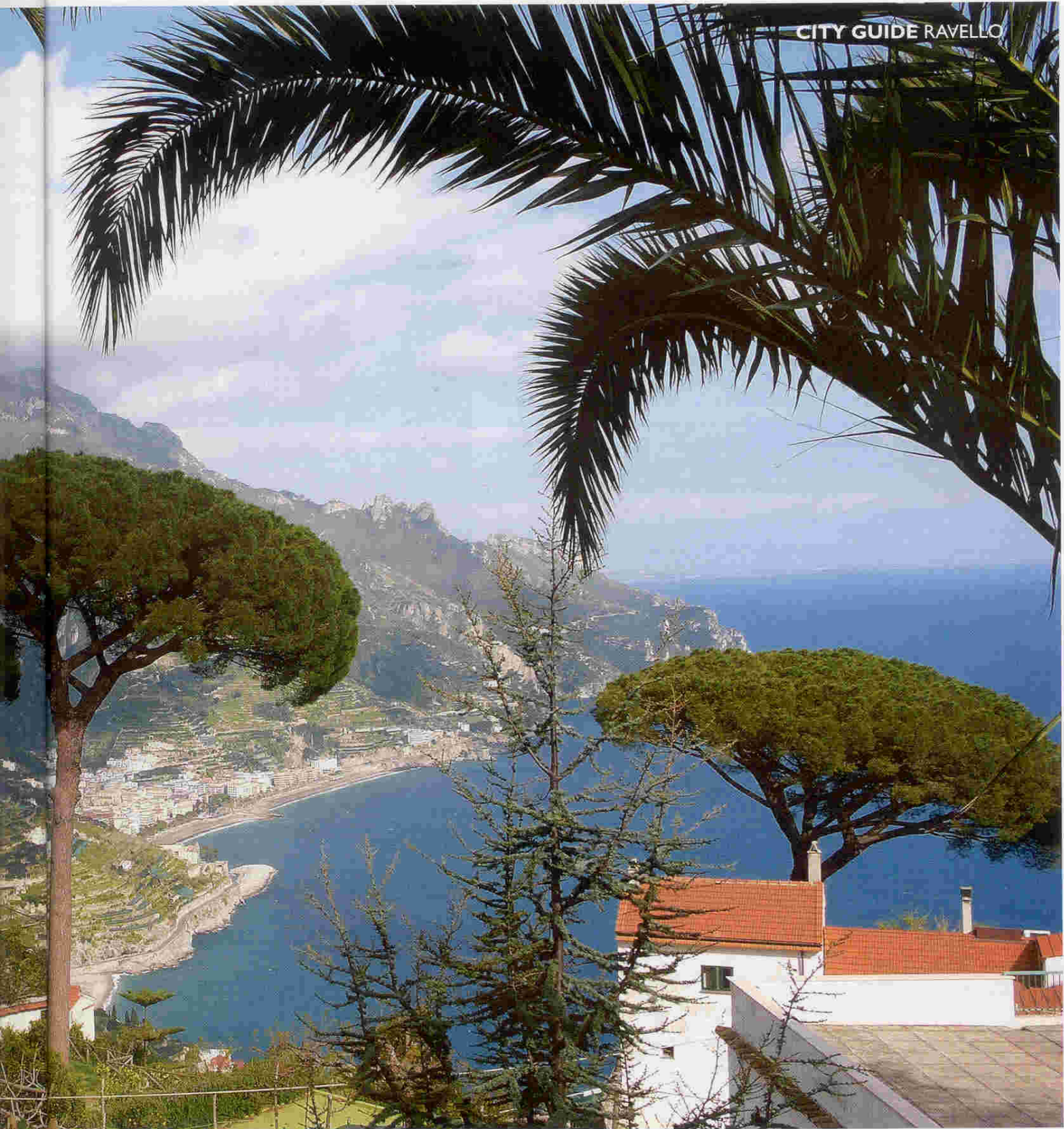
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RAVELLO

in the springtime



Jane Gifford takes an early break to sample the delights of this celebrated mountain town »

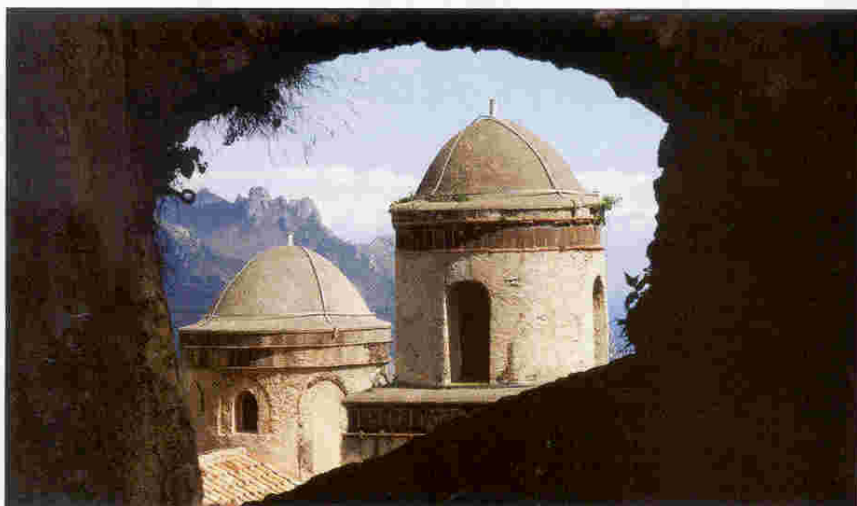
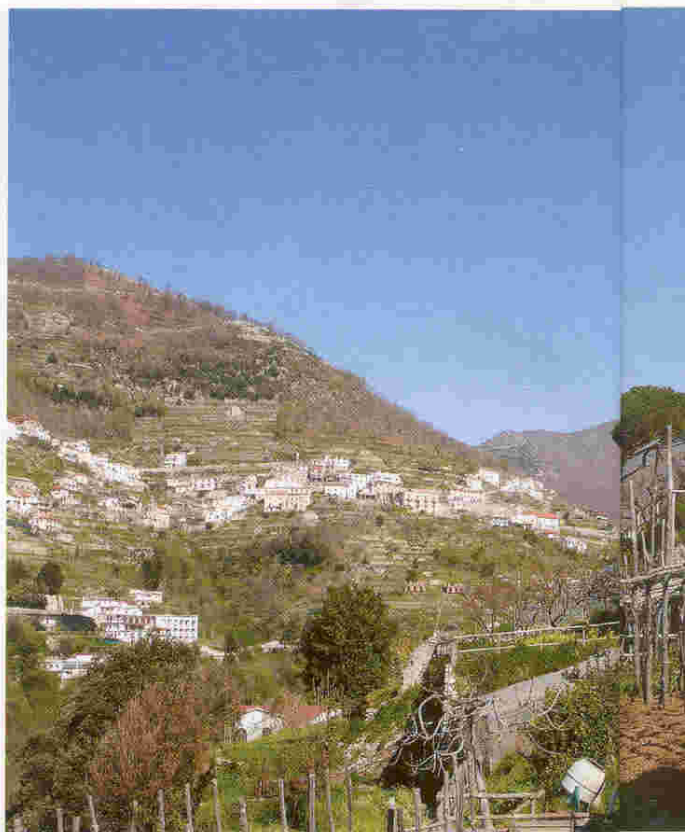
Photography by **Jane Gifford**

Above: A view to Licosà Point and the Amalfi Coast
Right: Vesuvius and Naples on the road to Ravello

Certainly it was something of a risk to spend four nights in Ravello out of season in early spring. It's high up in the Lattari Mountains. I could be in for nothing but rain. Up before dawn, I step out in to the cloud. It's filled with birdsong. Dawn breaks and the sun filters through. There's a glimpse of the sparkling Med, way below. Soft light eases its way over tier upon tier of houses and orange groves, slipping down the mountains to the sea. Close by, the 13th-century bell-tower of Santa Maria Annunziata is bathed in early morning sun. There are the Moorish towers of Villa Rufolo, seen through palm trees, and those trademark pines. Wisteria is coming in to bloom. The rising sun is behind it all and clouds are racing along the mountain ridges to Licosa Point. There's a glimpse of a monastery, impossibly high up on a distant peak, and the sound of choral singing drifting up from a convent below.

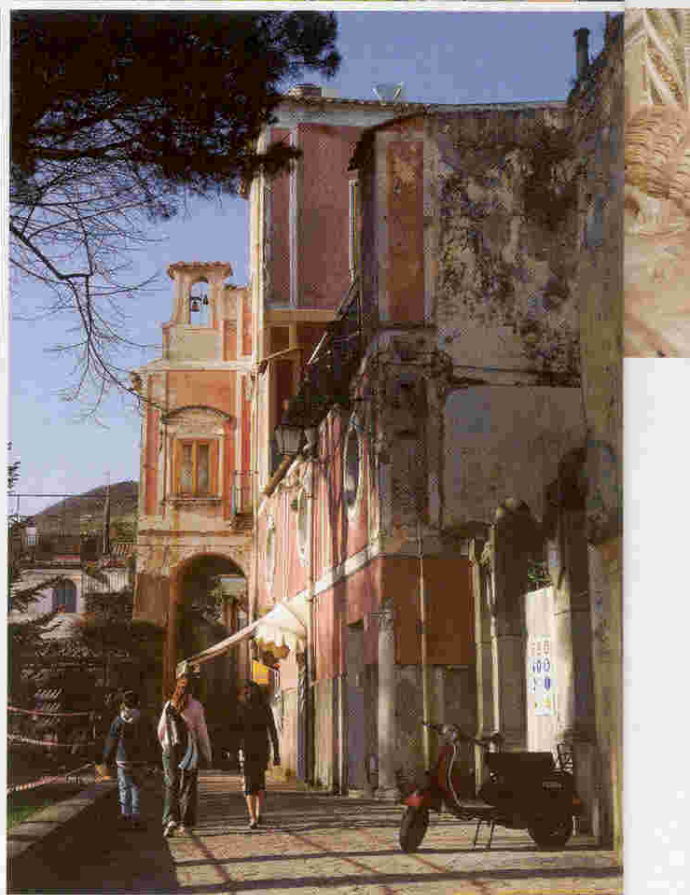
I am falling in love with Ravello just as the composer Wagner did when he visited Villa Rufolo in 1888. He believed he had finally found the 'Enchanted Garden of Klingsor', thanks both to the stunning view and the

Right: Admiring the view across the valley to Scala
Below: The 13th-century bell tower of Santa Maria Annunziata
Below right: The faded splendour of a Ravello street



endeavours of Scottish botanist and art expert Sir Francis Neville Reid, who bought Villa Rufolo in 1851, restoring it and filling the gardens with collected rarities. Another traveller similarly beguiled was Ernest William Beckett, later Lord Grimthorpe, who bought a farm here in 1904 and transformed it into Villa Cimbrone, with the confident claim that he would make it the most beautiful place on earth.

Ravello is now famous as a luxury hideaway for celebs – the likes of Rod Stewart and Michael Stipe. They come for its palaces, restyled as chic and exclusive hotels with infinity pools and fabulous views – Palazzo Sasso, The Caruso, Palazzo Confalone, Villa Cimbrone too. Staying here you



THE BEST OF RAVELLO

BEST VIEWS

You will find stunning views almost everywhere in Ravello: Villa Cimbrone's terrace of Infinity; the top terrace at Villa Rufolo; Piazza Duomo; Belvedere.

Principessa di Piemonte; from my apartment, 'Wagner', at Villa Casale; plus on the way to and from the airport, looking over the city of Naples and Mount Vesuvius.

BEST HISTORICAL MONUMENTS

When you're in town, be sure that you don't miss Villa Rufolo, the Cathedral, and the Basilica of San Giovanni del Toro.

BEST GARDEN

Villa Cimbrone (Via S. Chiara 20 +39 089 857139; www.villacimbrone.com).

BEST SOLVENTS

Besides photos, be sure to

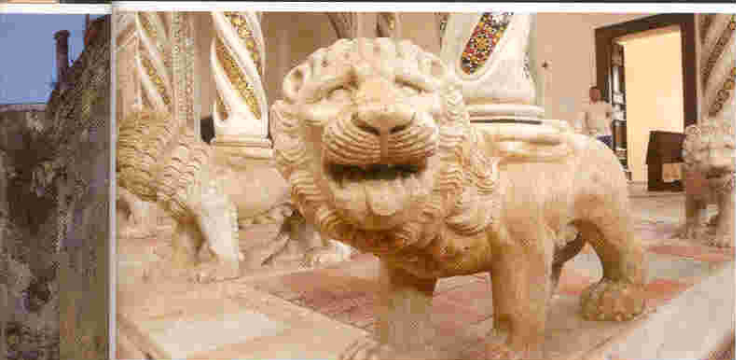
"I AM FALLING IN LOVE WITH RAVELLO JUST AS WAGNER DID WHEN VISITING IN 1888"

conversation. Occasional tourists stand out in their summer clothes. To them it is warm but the locals are still dressed for winter. Majolica pottery studios brighten the streets and there's plenty of scope for shopping and interesting places to eat and drink. Villa Rufolo is now owned by Campania Regional Authority and has become the central tourist attraction in town. It's a hugely popular venue for concerts, conferences, exhibitions and weddings. The 11th-century cathedral has been a site of pilgrimage for hundreds of years. San Pantaleone's preserved blood is said to miraculously liquefy every 27 July – the anniversary of his beheading...

VIEW TO A THRILL

From Piazza Duomo, you can see Scala beneath the opposite peak, the oldest of the mountain towns, here for at least 1,500 years. Preserving their independence, these remote communities prospered in allegiance with The Maritime Republic of Amalfi and provided sanctuary to noble families who rebelled against the power of Venice. Ravello is a more recent name for the town. Previously it was more appropriately called Rebello. Hundreds of spectacularly steep stone staircases link Scala and Ravello with Amalfi and the coast. Using them makes you appreciate how bold those restoration dreams of the past were. Donkeys did the carrying of course, but the journey

Left: Elegantly decorated 13th-century marble lions supporting the columns at Il Duomo. Below: Piazza Duomo is the hub of Ravello's social life.



might not bother to see the rest of the town, but you will need a healthy bank balance to enjoy the privilege. The 12th-century Basilica of San Giovanni del Toro is glorious in the evening light. The view in the other direction is mostly hogged by the palaces. The manager of The Caruso sweeps open the door revealing the exclusive panorama of the bay and mountains through his sumptuous hotel. He knows it never fails to impress.

Piazza Duomo is the hub of social life in Ravello. It's early morning and the residents still have the old town pretty much to themselves. An old man is the first out to catch the rays from his regular spot. Others gather to chat and argue over a coffee and a newspaper at tables round the square. Already there is a definite buzz in the old walled town. Women carry shopping baskets full of fresh food for the day. Children charge about playing football. Two English professor-types in suits stride across the square deep in



pay a visit to one of the ceramic factories – you won't come away empty-handed... Try Factory Ceramiche d'Arre Pascal (Via Roma, 20/22; www.ceramichearre.com) and

Factory Cosmolena di Margherita Di Palma (Via della Motta, 15/19; www.ceramichepalma.com).

BEST TIME OF DAY
The beautiful dawn

light is wonderful for photography, so get up early to appreciate the best of Ravello.

BEST CONCERTS
The 'Città della Musica'

hosts the following events: Concerti Apertivi in May-June; Ravello Music Festival from 27 June-31 October; and between 13 September to 1 November there are exclusive events

featuring musicians from southern Italy. See www.villarufolo.it.

BEST EXCURSIONS

For the fit, use the stairs to Amalfi and Minori. For »



Above: Scala from Villa Cimbrone
 Opposite, clockwise from top: Villa Cimbrone's Terrace of Infinity; The entrance to Cimbrone; The villa's expansive grounds; Relics in the cloister; The Bacchus Temple

up and down was certainly challenging. Returning to the airport, we wind down through the clouds for half an hour or more, one steep valley after another, then emerge on the opposite flank of the Lattari Mountains. A conical hill juts out below. We are still really high up, way above the suburbs of Naples and the dawn clouds unfurling round Vesuvius.

The gatehouse to Villa Rufolo leads off Piazza Duomo. With the sky overcast, the famous pillars and arches of the Moorish courtyard are only dimly lit. The stylish Italians have considered this and hung a huge mobile of crimped steel from the top of the tower. It catches light from the patch of sky above, reflecting it round the walls. An ancient stone bench beneath tall palms in the cloister garden is shiny with rain as the blue skies return. Many of the exotic trees, like the cycads in the centre of the flowerbeds, are now 150 years old. The view is justly famous, especially towards sunset, when lengthening shadows break up the symmetry of the formal gardens on the lower terrace, reaching for the balustrade and the fabulous panorama of mountains, sea

"IN THE OLD TOWN I AM PASSED BY THE INEVITABLE NUN-ON-A-MOPED"

and sky. In summer a stage with a glass back and sides is hung from this balustrade, allowing musicians to appear magically suspended against this beautiful natural backdrop while they perform to an audience seated in the garden. Ravello has now been dubbed 'Città della Musica', and tickets for the concert season are hot property.

Villa Cimbrone is a pleasant walk away up steep cobbled streets on a headland on the other side of town. No cars are allowed in the old town, although I am passed by the inevitable nun-on-a-moped. It's a glorious day. An old man and I lean on a wall, the sun on our faces, taking in the view to the coast. The stone is warm. A sign tells me the immaculate organic vegetable garden on the other side of the wall produces food for Villa Maria.

INFINITY AND BEYOND

Earthenware pots, a perfect lawn and a fountain with several cherubs wrestling a swan over a pond of goldfish announce my arrival at Villa Cimbrone. Visitors are advised first to walk down the sunken 'Alley of Immensity' and then on to the 'Terrace of Infinity' but I can't resist the quirky collection of treasures in the cloisters and the statues on the lawns. Finally I am lured through Ceres Temple and out on to the terrace. Not the right way maybe, but I am still stopped in my tracks by the row of white marble busts against the perfect blue sky and sea, and still impressed to discover the 1,000-foot sheer drop below as I lean over the balustrade. For most of the afternoon I have the garden entirely to myself. I follow informal wooded paths along the cliff-side and meet a bronze of Mercury, sat dreaming with his back to the view.

Lord Grimthorpe left instructions to be buried at Villa Cimbrone. He lies beneath a temple on a secluded ledge not far from Mercury's dreaming spot, where a satyr feeds grapes to Bacchus, both naked and blissfully happy.

If you fancy something completely different, then escape to Ravello in early spring. Hundreds of illustrious artists and eccentrics have found sanctuary and inspiration here – Wagner, Grieg, Toscanini, Esher, Turner, Ruskin and Miro, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolfe, Andre Gide, Graham Greene, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, Greta Garbo and many more... perhaps you will, too. Ravello is the kind of place that gets under your skin and leaves you singing to yourself for the rest of the day. **TIM**

the less fit, take a bus or taxi to the coast.

BEST FESTIVAL
 Celebrate Easter at the Festival of San Pantaleone, patron

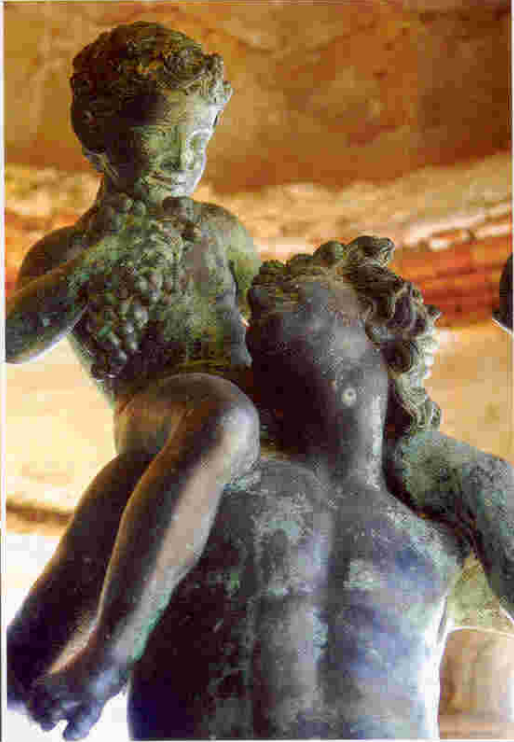
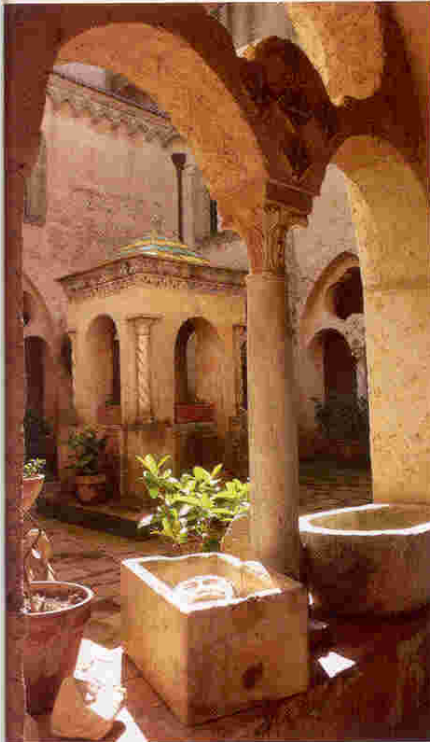
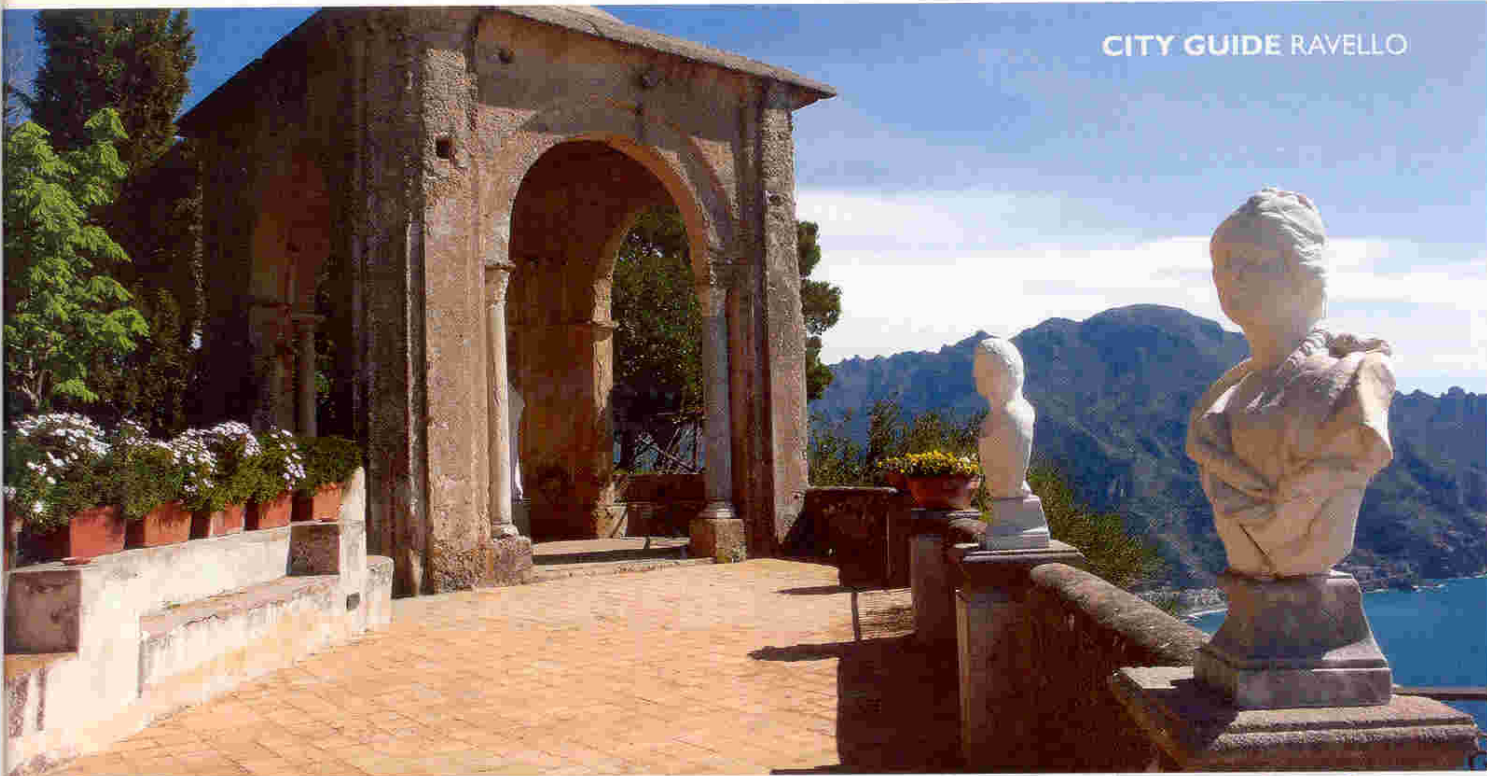
saint of Ravello, at Il Duomo on 27 July, with processions, miracles, concerts and exhibitions.

BEST DAY AWAY
 Eat lunch at a farmhouse

in the mountains at Tramonti and take a guided tour of San Francesco vineyards and wine factory (Via Sofielano 18, Tramonti; +39 089 826748).

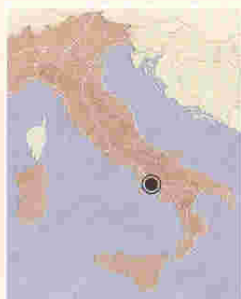
AND DON'T FORGET...
 Even if you can't afford to stay at the grand hotels, you can still enjoy a meal there or just a drink to take in the fabulous surroundings.

**NEXT
 ISSUE
 VENICE**



essentials

Your at-a-glance guide to the facts and contacts you need to plan your trip



✚ GETTING THERE

British Airways (www.ba.com) and **easyJet** (www.easyjet.com) both fly from London to Naples Capodichino Airport. From there, Buses **Autolinee SITA** leave Naples from Porto Immacolatella. The nearest train station is **Salerno** – busses from Salerno go via Amalfi and depart from Via Vinciprova. For the return journey, busses from Amalfi depart from **Piazzale Flavio Gioia**

/ TOURIST INFORMATION

Azienda Autonoma Soggiorno e Turismo di Ravello (Via Roma; +39 089 857096; www.ravellotime.it) has local tourist information.

● For information about the wider region, see www.turismoregionecampania.it

THE ITALIAN MAGAZINE RECOMMENDS...



Left to right: Ceramics are a popular souvenir; The famous view from Villa Rufolo's top terrace; A Roman column, with carvings from the Middle Ages, at Cimbrone

✚ WHERE TO STAY

✚ 5 STAR

The 45-room **Caruso** (Piazza San Giovanni del Toro 2, Ravello; +39 089 858801; www.hotelcaruso.com) offers absolute luxury in a palace on a cliff 1,000 feet above the Med. Infinity pool and spectacular views. B&B double from €583, although three nights for the price of two are available. The hotel's two restaurants are also open to non-residents. Open 8 April to 26 October.

✚ 4 STAR

Slightly off the beaten track, **Villa Cimbrone** (Via Santa Chiara 26, Ravello; +39 089 857459/858072; www.villacimbrone.com) is an exclusive luxury hotel with only 19 rooms, a unique garden and a view that Gore Vidal described as "the most beautiful panorama in the

world". B&B double from €330. Restaurant open to non-residents. Open April to October.

✚ 3 STAR

Four generations of the Schiavo family have welcomed guests to the friendly **Hotel Toro** (Via Roma 16, Ravello; +39 089 857 211; www.hoteltoro.it) in the heart of Ravello. Pleasant garden. B&B double from €113. Full board per person €94. Check website for last-minute special offers.

✕ WHERE TO EAT

✚ SUMPTUOUS CUISINE

Villa Maria (Via Santa Chiara 2, +39 09 857255; www.villamaria.it) is an elegant four-star hotel and restaurant in peaceful location with great views. All food is organic and locally produced. Run since 1934 by four generations of the Palumbo

family. Also at Villa Maria is the Nonna Orsola Cookery School.

✚ BAR/PIZZERIA

La Vecchia Cantina di Salvatore di Palma (Via della Marra 15; +39 089 8586203) offers excellent food and friendly service right in the centre of town, with a leafy terrace and a wonderful valley view. Equally popular with both tourists and locals.

✚ HOMECOOKED FARE

Cumpà Cosimo Trattoria-Pizzeria di Netta Buttone (Via Roma, 44-46; +39 089 857156) has wonderful traditional local food grown and prepared by Netta and her family, who have lived and worked here for many generations. Large helpings in unpretentious surroundings and at a very reasonable prices.

✚ WORTH KNOWING

Prices on menus are for tourists. Out of season you may well be charged as a local – usually half price! Also all the regional wine, both red and white, is excellent.

JANE'S CHOICE



"For a fraction of the price of the grand hotels, try a self-catering

holiday at Villa Casale (Via Orso Papice 4, Ravello; +39 089; www.ravelloresidence.it), with prices from €750 for a week. The well-appointed apartments have a beautiful shared pool, are in a fabulous location with great views, and are right next door to Villa Rufolo, just a five-minute walk for provisions."