

Baby London, Baby Surrey, Baby Hampshire

Spring 2014



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Robin Glover heads to the Amalfi Coast to stay at the stunning Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria in Sorrento and for a taste of the 'dolce vita.'

WORDS: ROBIN GLOVER | IMAGES: GRAND HOTEL EXCELSIOR VITTORIA

Sorrento is the start of the beautiful 'Amalfi Coast' and well served by road and railway links to Naples, the nearest international airport. Even so, we opted to experience the passenger ferry across the Bay of Naples. Speeding over the calm Mediterranean waters between Naples and Sorrento, we were treated to a close-up of the magnificent Mount Vesuvius, whose volcanic eruption in 79AD famously buried Pompeii. I am relieved that, nowadays, Mount Vesuvius looks calm, dormant and docile.

Entering the harbour in Sorrento, it was impossible to miss our destination, the palatial 5\* Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria, which splendidly dominates the skyline above the port, announcing

itself in bold lettering painted on its magnificent terrace wall. The journey up to the hotel from sea-level looks daunting but, although there is an excellent private lift from the port to the hotel, the taxi ride is both quick, cheap and much better for transporting luggage! A bonus is the treat of cruising through the handsome gates and up the hotel's immaculate drive, through the quiet park, and being greeted by a



liveried porter, eager to welcome you.

At reception, we were greeted by more members of the ever-attentive staff and realised that this was to be a special experience. We walked to our room through comfortable lounges, with paintings of the hotel and photographs of famous former guests. The grand staircase stirred the imagination of bejewelled ladies, and their escorts, parading towards the grand balls of their time. Our room was large and lavishly furnished and the bathroom modern and efficient. The wow-factor really hit us when we stepped onto the balcony, to be confronted by a dream view across the bay to Vesuvius, with nothing between us except the blue sea, distant boats and yachts and a few seabirds, hundreds of feet below.

Unsurprisingly, the luxury extends to include the cocktail bar and terrace

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where we and our fellow guests took pre-dinner drinks, entertained by a talented pianist at his Steinway. The anticipation of the dining experience was only exceeded by the reality. In the Michelin starred Terrazza Bosquet restaurant, led by Executive Chef and Michelin star awarded Luigi Tramontano, standards of cuisine are of the



highest order, with a wide range of international and regional delights. The exquisite dishes, and wines, were proudly presented by the skilled waiting staff and the whole dining experience was superbly directed by Nicoletta, the charming 'maitresse d'. Guests may choose to eat, alfresco, on the spectacular terrace or in the ornate dining room, with views on three sides, ornately painted ceilings and yet another Steinway entertainer!

Outside the hotel gates is the main



square, lined with typical cafés shops, and the historic centre of the old town is just a few strides further away. After the time taken to explore its narrow, pedestrian streets, rewarded by the sights, smells and sounds of a bustling Italian village, we were sorely in need of rest and refreshment, and happened on the 'Foreigners' Club', otherwise known as the 'Circolo dei Forestieri', a friendly bar-restaurant with great food and drink, enjoying the same cliff-top views across the bay as its illustrious next-door neighbour.

The Bay of Naples has, at its heart, the

*“After the time taken to explore its narrow, pedestrian streets, rewarded by the sights, smells and sounds of a bustling Italian village”*

infamous Mount Vesuvius and, on each side of the volcano lie the Roman towns swamped by the eruption. We chose to visit the less crowded excavations of Herculaneum, more atmospheric than Pompeii and just as memorable. The exposed section of the ruined town provides a window into the lives of the people caught up in that horrific event. A 30-40 minute train ride from the centre of Sorrento takes you to either of these unforgettable sites. However, the ancient streets and pavements are not, I'm afraid, pushchair friendly and younger visitors might easily become bored.

The Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria welcomes children of all ages, providing imaginatively designed play facilities and sports areas, including a five-a-side soccer field and a basketball court. In addition, there is a dedicated swimming pool in the immaculate pool



area, where the 'L'Orangerie' provides all-day light meals and drinks. The hotel also offers its little guests a special menu, satellite cartoon channels and pizza-cooking lessons! Naturally, a baby-sitting service is available, on request. If you plan carefully, while the little ones are otherwise occupied, you will have time for a relaxing treatment at the hotel's boutique spa 'La Serra'.

We chose to sample the 'sweet life' at Positano, an impossibly pretty seaside village just along the Amalfi Coast, where the houses tumble down the hillside from the main road to the busy beach area, quay and promenade. Later, well-fed and watered, but not fancying the climb back up to the cliff-road, we elected for the exhilarating comforts of the fast ferry, back to Sorrento in half-an-hour.

The Excelsior Vittoria is a member of the exclusive 'Small Luxury Hotels of the World' group and combines an elegant Savoy-like style with country-house weekend ambience. We enjoyed unstinting care and attention, dedicated to our satisfaction, and a visit to this very Grand Hotel could not disappoint. Combine this with the blissful Mediterranean climate, and you have all the makings to create a truly memorable family holiday. 🌸

### Grand Hotel Excelsior

3 nights at the Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria costs from £790 per person (in April 2014) from £944 (in May 2014) based on 2 adults sharing a classic garden view room on a b&b basis and includes return flights from London Gatwick to Naples and private transfers booked through Classic Collection Holidays (0800 294 9324 [www.classic-collection.co.uk](http://www.classic-collection.co.uk))

\* For further information on The Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria please visit [www.exvitt.it](http://www.exvitt.it) or call the hotel on +39 081 877 7871.