



Breakfast at the Belmond Hotel Caruso, Ravello

# An Amalfi gourmet drive

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The restaurants and hotels of Naples and its environs have so much more to offer than pizza. **Adrian Mourby** and his wife took a tour by car, never hesitating to try some of the finest dining experiences on their route...

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**T**here is always a warm welcome at il Ristorantino dell'Avvocato for anyone willing to brave the Neapolitan traffic. The advocate in question is Raffaele Cardillo, a real Neapolitan lawyer who retired 16 years ago to open this small restaurant behind via Partenope. Fans of the lawyer-turned-cook say he honed his skills at dinner parties for friends. It's the kind of place

that tourists rarely notice, but locals usually have all eight tables booked.

Arriving there after driving our hire car through some psychotic traffic, my wife and I were met by handshakes from the waiters and the gentle smile of the maestro himself, emerging from the kitchen in his characteristic black chef's jacket.

This time we found a lot of cuttlefish on the menu. I ate an antipasto of cuttlefish cappuccino, cuttlefish with artichoke, and

cuttlefish sandwiches which were exactly that: sandwiches made with sliced white bread. Kate ordered another trio: codfish parmigiana, fish strudel and broccoli, and cupcake of anchovies and zucchini. We were by turns startled and delighted by our selections. The recommended wine, a Sireo white from Abbazia di Crapolla, was fresh, dry, yet fruity.

The next day we set off through Naples with vehicles on both sides of us sporting huge scrapes and ➤



The Santa Caterina Hotel, just above Amalfi



Chef Raffaele of the Ristorantino dell'Avvocato

➤ innumerable dents. Seven-lane intersections are alarming when the other cars have less to lose than you do. I let in every car that pushed in front of me.

Heading towards the via Panoramico it was impossible not to turn off and see Pompeii. It's too good to visit only once. We saw the Villa of the Mysteries for the first time, and I ate a fine mushroom and anchovy calzone at a crowded pizzeria by the car park while Kate ordered a salad. We were keeping things light as that evening we were due to stay at Don Alfonso 1890 and – even better – eat in Alfonso's pink and white dining room.

It is hard to find Sant'Agata sui Due Golfi, a town up above the city of Sorrento, but very easy to become a member of Alfonso's extended family. On this, our second visit, we were both hugged by Mario, the manager – not my usual experience of a Relais & Chateau hotel.

Alfonso Iaccarino and his wife, Livia, are a local legend. In 1973 he opened this restaurant with rooms so that he could afford to marry Livia. Alfonso's ambition and his uncanny abilities in the kitchen has made 1890 sufficiently famous to have spawned a new satellite, Don Alfonso in Dubai, which opened earlier this year.

**WHERE TO EAT**

➤ **IL RISTORANTINO DELL'AVVOCATO**

Via S. Lucia 115, Naples  
☎ +39 081 0320047  
ilristorantinodellavvocato.it  
Inventive dishes in a small restaurant frequented by Neapolitan professionals.  
Price range €€€

➤ **BAR SGAMBATI**

Via Villa dei Misteri 1, Pompeii  
☎ +39 081 8610966  
Good basic pizzeria just by the entrance to Pompeii's excavations. Veseri is their good-value *vino da tavola*.  
Price range €

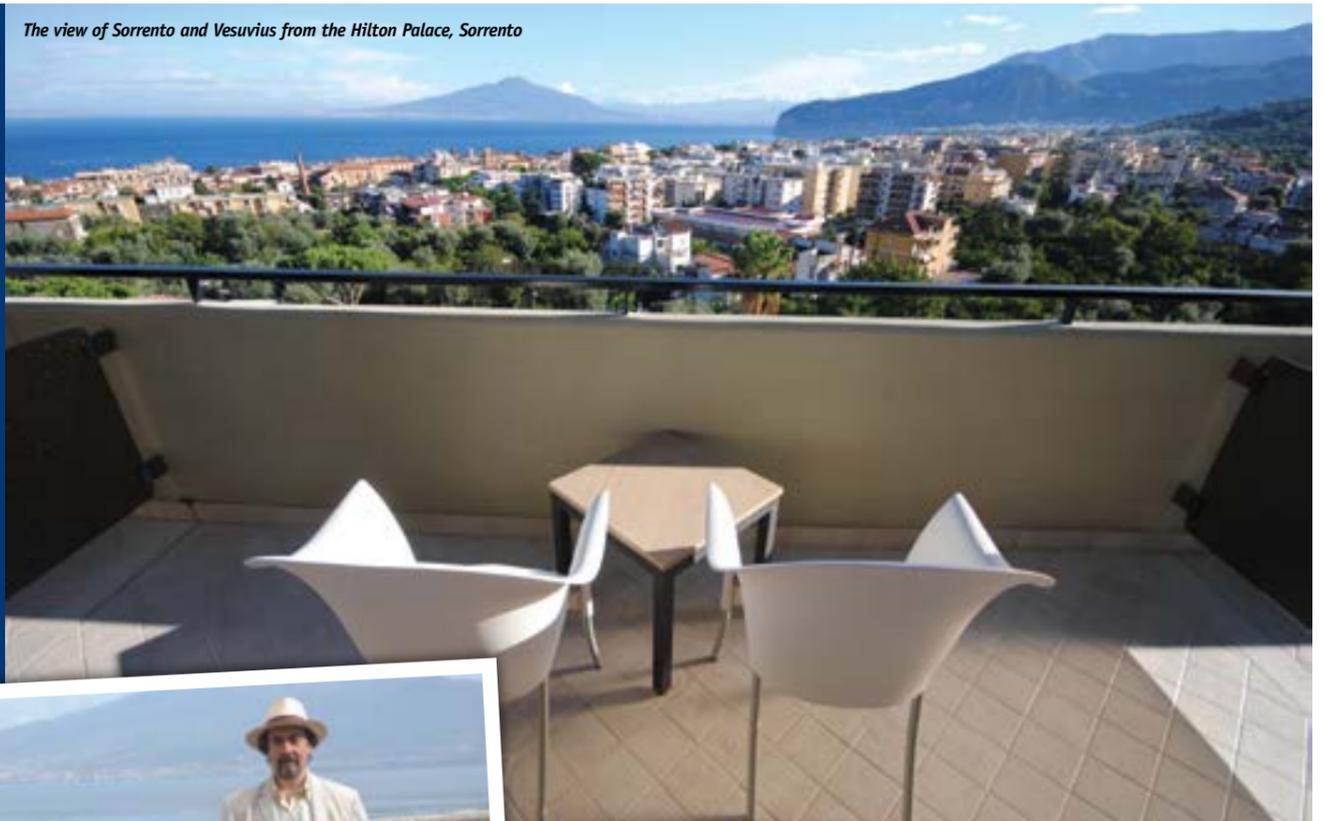
➤ **UN PIANO NEL CIELO**

Via Gennaro Capriglione 147, Priano  
☎ +39 089 8131333  
www.casangelina.com  
Casa Angelina's modern fine dining restaurant "in the sky" has superb top floor views across the Gulf of Salerno.  
Price range €€€

We were given home-made lemonade in the plush lodge-cum-showroom before being escorted to our bright pink and yellow bedroom, where we could rest and prepare for dinner. The dining room at Don Alfonso 1890 is a large, bright white affair graced with pink Louis XV chairs. We had a table facing the kitchen window where a lot of handsome young men and a few women were performing the silent drama of cooking. Alfonso, in his white monogrammed jacket, came out and shook hands with all the diners. We were asked whether we wished to choose from the menu or have something prepared specially for us. I always go for the latter.

Soon Maurizio the sommelier came and introduced himself. Having looked at what we were eating, he had firm ideas about what we should be drinking. We started with a Joaquin dall'Isola, a white wine from Capri. As an amuse-bouche we were brought steak tartare served in a tiny newspaper cone that had been specially printed to show West Ham football results. This attention to detail is part of what makes Don Alfonso such a fun place to dine. The presence of

The view of Sorrento and Vesuvius from the Hilton Palace, Sorrento



Please don't hit my car!

*As an amuse-bouche we were brought steak tartare served in a tiny newspaper cone printed to show West Ham football results*



Looking down to the sea from Santa Caterina

Madama Livia visiting your table with her ready smile is also part of the experience.

Each dish was presented with the date of its inception. We ate smoked Mediterranean yellow tail (2011), deep fried lobster (2010), baked egg yolk with burrata and black truffles (2013), and new 2014 creations like home-made spaghetti, cappelli stuffed with buffalo, and breaded and fried codfish. The dishes kept coming and I actually gave up, overwhelmed, before dessert.

The next day we were due to drive to Amalfi, which should have been easy. I was prepared for the coast road that loops crazily back on

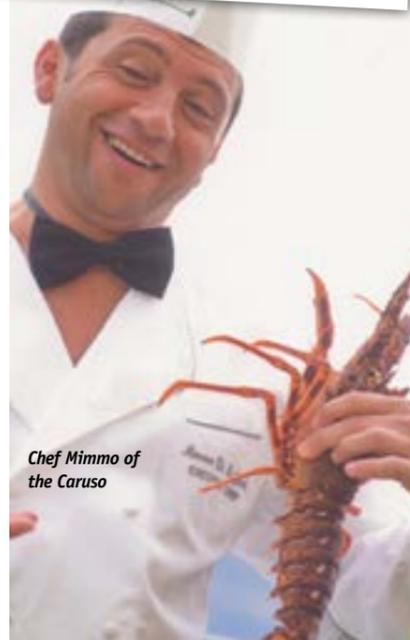
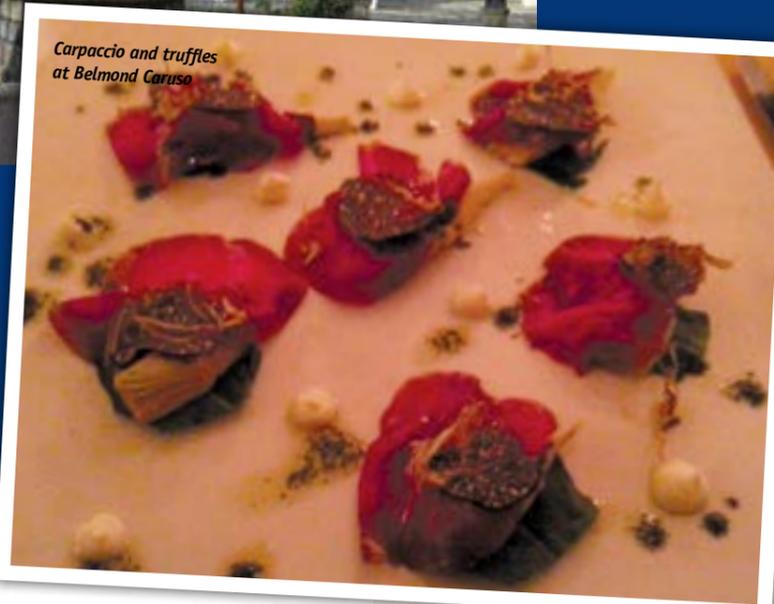
itself after the village of San Pietro, but I hadn't anticipated the mist. It took us three attempts to leave Sant'Agata. But once we reached the Costa Amalfitana the mist cleared and the views were dramatic. My wife had a great time leaning out the passenger window with her camera, all the while telling me not to look at the views she was snapping. As if the road weren't narrow enough, people were parking on bends or even stopping their cars to have a chat, reducing the room to squeeze past to virtually nothing. Coaches also made life interesting, pulling over so their passengers could swarm into ceramic factories

built into cliffs or visit lay-bys selling limoncello and peppers. This is lemon territory, with terraces of fruit above covered in black netting. We headed down past these through Positano – a town that looks like a cliff with shutters – and Praiano before reaching Hotel Santa Caterina, just above Amalfi. The crescent façade of this hotel was built in 1906 and the enterprise is still owned by the Gambardella family. Inside it is like coming into someone's home, with paintings, works of art and bits of furniture that are family possessions rather than the work of one designer. With its metal conservatory restaurant ➤

Don Alfonso 1890



Carpaccio and truffles at Belmond Caruso



Chef Mimmo of the Caruso

► and vertiginous lift that plunges down the cliff to a rocky sea shore, Santa Caterina is Italy's Grand Hotel Budapest. The staff are similarly devoted to it. Pino the head waiter has been looking after tables for more than 30 years – when Pino recommends a special you really don't want to disappoint him by ordering something else. We were given a bedroom on the first floor overlooking the sea and took the lift down to the shore, just to say we had swum in the Med, then rested before arriving suitably dressed to meet Pino at 8.30pm. I ordered the locally-caught grouper (much to Pino's delight)

with a mountain of beef carpaccio as an antipasto. Kate took Pino's recommendation of fried zucchini flowers stuffed with ricotta as her starter, with a lobster salad to follow. We were advised to order a local wine, the Furore Bianco Fiorduva from Marisa Cuomo, and were told that we really should have the lemon soufflé to follow. We did everything we were told and were very happy. After the multi-course high drama of Don Alfonso 1890, this was like dining with one's wealthy Italian in-laws. In the view of Andrew Camera, the manager – who, with 15 years' service, considers himself one of the hotel's

youngest employees – this is what Santa Caterina is all about. The hotel has a phenomenal level of return guests from all over the world. No one wants it to change too much! The following day we drove to Ravello, which was no distance by road, but to get 330 metres above sea level we encountered almost as many hairpin bends. It was wonderful to arrive at Hotel Caruso and have our car and luggage whisked away. We were given a room at the top of this maze of a former palazzo with its hanging garden and infinity swimming pool. Unlike Don Alfonso and Santa Caterina, this hotel is a resort in

WHERE TO STAY

- **HOTEL SAN FRANCESCO AL MONTE**  
Corso Vittorio Emanuele 328, Naples  
☎ +39 081 423 9111  
[www.sanfrancescoalmonite.it](http://www.sanfrancescoalmonite.it)  
Atmospheric former convent overlooking the Bay of Naples with great panoramic breakfast terrace. Double rooms from €120.
- **HILTON SORRENTO PALACE**  
Via S. Antonio 13, Sorrento  
☎ +39 081 878 4141  
[www3.hilton.com](http://www3.hilton.com)  
Fantastic views across to Vesuvius from this modern hotel with a superbly-staffed restaurant. Double rooms from €180.
- **BELLEVUE SYRENE**  
Piazza della Vittoria 5, Sorrento  
☎ +39 081 878 1024  
[www.bellevue.it](http://www.bellevue.it)  
The Grand Dame of Sorrento has a stunning cliff-top position, elegant public rooms and lovely breakfast terrace. Double rooms from €450.

Kate at the Caruso's infinity pool

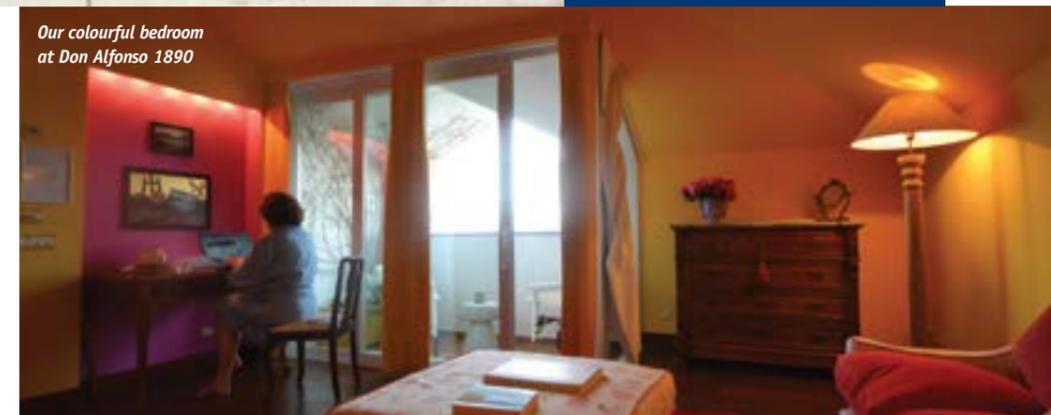


WHERE TO STAY & EAT

- **DON ALFONSO 1890 BOUTIQUE HOTEL**  
Sant'Agata Sui Due Golfi  
Corso Sant'Agata 11  
☎ +39 081 878 0026  
[www.donalfonso.com](http://www.donalfonso.com)  
The extraordinary Alfonso has turned his restaurant with six rooms into a world-famous brand. Double rooms from €270 for B&B.
- **HOTEL SANTA CATERINA**  
Via Mauro Comite 9, Amalfi  
☎ +39 089 871012  
[hotelsantacaterina.it](http://hotelsantacaterina.it)  
Lovely, old-fashioned family-owned hotel whose restaurant has an Edwardian swagger to it. Double rooms from €380 for B&B.
- **BELMOND HOTEL CARUSO**  
Piazza San Giovanni del Toro 2, Ravello  
☎ +39 089 858 800  
[www.belmond.com](http://www.belmond.com)  
One of a number of gorgeous palazzi owned by the Belmond group. Superb service and a hard-to-prize-yourself-away swimming pool. Double rooms from €438 for B&B.

itself, making it very difficult to get out and explore the town. That evening we met up with Chef de Cuisine Mimmo Di Raffaele for a drink before dinner in the high-ceilinged bar. Almost immediately we were overwhelmed with so many tempting bar snacks we had to fight them off. Mimmo told us that he had worked in hotel restaurants in Switzerland, in Milan and Rome, but that the Amalfi Coast was his home. "I like to cook locally. I come from Caserta and my aim is to offer a large variety of local products. On this coast there is so much food grown in the countryside that you do not need to import ingredients!" At a push, Chef Mimmo will bring in lobster from Sardinia and truffles from Irpinia, but one third of everything he cooks comes from within just 10 kilometres of Ravello. "We have a sea rich in cod and pezzogna and anchovies and I have fishermen who call me and tell me what they have caught. Sometimes we have tuna from Cetara, which makes for delectable canapés. We also grow the lemon sfusato, with its thick skin, which I use in linguine and tortelli and in desserts and

Our colourful bedroom at Don Alfonso 1890



the vegetarian menu. We have an abundance of olives, and our own sweet, unique tomatoes. We have local pork and I have my own herb garden outside the kitchen." Perhaps it's not surprising that the Costiera Amalfitana claims to be the home of 'zero kilometres' cookery in Italy. We dined on the terrace overlooking the Gulf of Salerno. I ordered carpaccio di manzo, presented in little truffle-topped islands, and the pezzogna fish served in a local sauce of olives, capers, potatoes and cherry tomatoes. Kate had the veal with sfusato lemon, capers and broccoli. The wines offered a further exploration of

Marisa Cuomo's best work. It was a push to finish off with a selection of sorbets topped with spun sugar. We weren't sure if the view was making the food taste better or the food was flavouring the view. Costiera Amalfitana really does have everything you could ask for. ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

- **CAR HIRE**  
Europcar  
☎ +39 06 96709592, [www.europcar.it](http://www.europcar.it)  
offers car hire starting at €23 per day from Naples airport
- **CONTACT**  
[www.com-tur.com](http://www.com-tur.com)