

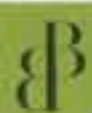
DEPARTURES

A group of people are enjoying a ride on a wooden speedboat on the water. The boat is moving quickly, creating a large splash of white water. In the background, there is a coastal town built on a hillside, with buildings of various colors and styles. The town is surrounded by lush greenery and mountains. The sky is blue with some white clouds. The overall scene is one of luxury and vacation.

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Your Own Private Italy

Special Issue



HOW TO DO SORRENTO

For years, beautiful but busy Sorrento had slipped off our radar, lost in a tangle of tour buses and shops selling T-shirts and visors. But the Pullmans have left this Amalfi town. And while the flip-flop vendors still dot the streets off the main square, a spruced-up and more sophisticated Sorrento has taken hold.

WHAT TO BUY Intarsia, or marquetry work, is Sorrento's speciality. Pass over the mediocre and downright tacky (we even spotted a weeping clown) and head straight for the real thing at **Attardi** (45 Via Padre Giuliani; 39-081/878-1291). This emporium, in the *centro storico*, comprises several serious artisans' studios producing remarkable examples. The finest is that of **Giuseppe Rocco**, whose dexterity with the gouge and awl is equaled by his proficiency as a draftsman. For antique intarsia, look up **Massimo Gargiulo** (21 Via Padre Giuliani; 39-081/878-4879), the grandson of Francesco Grandi, one of the great 19th-century craftsmen. Massimo has an exquisite Pompeii-themed table with ivory detailing, which his grandfather carved in 1881 (around \$48,000).

WHERE TO EAT They're used to giving directions over the phone at **Ristorante La Torre del Sarracino**, but leave the hassle of getting there to a taxi driver. You'll want to pay full attention to Gennaro Esposito's creative way with such local ingredients as swordfish, which he turns into ravioli. It's not an unheard-of dish in southern Italy, but this chef uses the *pesce spada* itself, cut pasta-

thin, to form the ravioli case, which is then filled with a mix of diced spring greens and served on a bed of *scarola* (escarole), lightly mashed new potatoes, and pine nuts. A gentle bear of a man, Gennaro seems to spend as much time working the tables as he does cooking. *Dinner, \$145. At 9 Via Torretta, Marina di Seiano; 39-081/802-8555.*

WHERE TO CATCH

A CLASSIC "I've been doing a hotel in Sorrento," wrote Italian designer Gio Ponti in *Domus*, the influential architectural review he founded, "and I decided to give each of the hundred

rooms a different floor pattern." The **Parco dei Principi**, Ponti's playful neomodernist masterpiece, had only recently been inaugurated in 1962. He was less extravagant with his color palette: At the hotel, you can have any color you like—as long as it's blue. Ponti's classic, with its purpose-made furniture and pebble-mosaic walls, looks perfect after a recent refurbishment, and the semi-tropical park that extends behind the hotel is a cool green refuge. This business-oriented hotel doesn't have the service or facilities to match its good looks, but design mavens should definitely stop off for a drink in the bar. *At 1 Via Rota; 39-081/878-4644; www.hotelparcoprincipi.com.*

L.M.



WHERE TO STAY The venerable **Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria** is looking better than it has in decades. The Grand Tour decor, discreetly enhanced over the years by the hotel's owners (the Fiorentino family has continuously operated the hotel since building it in 1834), is in full bloom. Caruso's Suite, where the legendary Neapolitan tenor spent the last months of his life, receives much of the press, but we find it somber and fusty. Instead, choose the Margaret Suite in the oldest wing of the building, overlooking the panoramic terrace (a good spot for lunch or a drink). The room is a warm clutter of antiques, and the bathroom, with its freestanding Belle Epoque tub, is the nicest in the hotel. *Rates, \$425-\$2,400. At 34 Piazza Tasso; 39-081/807-1044; www.exvitt.it.*

The Grand Hotel Excelsior Vittoria (above), opened in 1834 and is still run by the founding family; the colorful Bay of Naples (right).