



# SMALL WONDER

## Stay and play on the Amalfi Coast

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I feel as if I've landed in the pages of E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, minus the chaperone cousin. At first light, the vista from the terrace of a corner guestroom is gauzy and golden. My viewing position is like a theatre's balcony box. Coffee in hand, I wait for the performance to begin. There's no sudden trumpeting or crash of cymbals, only a gentle dawn that reveals the glittering Tyrrhenian Sea and shapes of neighbouring buildings clinging to cliffs. In the distance are Positano and Capri. Way below, down at least 250 stone steeps, a boat will soon be waiting at La Gavitella Beach to whoosh me along the Amalfi Coast. "Captain Giampiero is at your service," promises the concierge.

I can think of few days that have started so promisingly. But Casa Angelina boutique hotel at Praiano on the Amalfi Coast defies expectations. With only 38 guestrooms and suites, and four beachside apartments, the inventory is so tiny it feels residential. The attention to detail, ratio of staff to guests and level of care are amazing. It's unique in being owned, with one stakeholder, by local entrepreneur Antonino Cappiello, who commissioned architect Gennaro Fusco to transform a one-time pensione on this site into a flat-roofed, modernist hotel. When the property opened in 2005, Cappiello named it for his late mother.

The all-white linear design across two wings, plus the tumbling dip and fall of levels and dazzling 180-degree panoramas, makes Casa Angelina "totally Amalfi", as Giampiero describes. Hotels, houses and apartments along this coastline jostle for views. Buildings appear to be craning their necks; plantings of vines and olives rise in perpendicular rows. I feel my calf muscles tighten as I walk up and up and down and down, and every time I pause there's an arbour of grapes or a storybook cottage with blue-shuttered windows or the braying of donkeys echoing around corners. I write in my Moleskine: "I have popped up in a calendar." I should cross it out but then Nonna from central casting appears out of a cascade of magenta bougainvillea with a basket of tomatoes under her wing. The description does not get deleted. And neither do my notes on the heart-shaped burrata in an insalata caprese salad at Casa Angelina's



Atrani on the Amalfi Coast, main; Casa Angelina, below left; the property's pool, left; breakfast treats, right



### IN THE KNOW

Casa Angelina is a member of Leading Hotels of the World. The hotel is about 10 minutes by car (or complimentary shuttle bus) from Positano and 30 minutes from Amalfi. Transfers are available from Naples airport or central station; local touring can be arranged. Rooms from about \$900 a night for two, including breakfast. Seasonal rates vary and may require a minimum two-night stay.  
[casangelina.com](http://casangelina.com)  
[lhw.com](http://lhw.com)

### MORE TO THE STORY

Viewing the Amalfi Coast from the sea offers a perspective too theatrical to be real. Casa Angelina's Giampiero, who laughs that he was "practically born on a boat", navigates our covered launch towards Ravello, past the summering crowds in their look-at-me cabin cruisers and yachts, all with extravagant communications dishes and aials, and a few with slippery dips and black-tinted windows. This is the land that sunscreen forgot. So many bronzed bodies, such exuberance, but it's the geography that steals the show. Giampiero points out historic landmarks and villas of the rich and feted clinging limpet-like to promontories. All those beach clubs with rocky shores and battalions of sunbeds and bright parasols; deep gorges crossed by stone viaducts; villages set in coves, their streets shadowed by church bell towers and full-skirted pines; historic defence towers and intriguing sea caves with iridescent blue water, such as Grotto Pandora up to which we rock and sway but, alas, only kayaks can safely enter. Undeterred, Team Casa Angelina, as we have dubbed ourselves during this impromptu regatta, zips past Atrani, southern Italy's smallest town. "Less than 1000 people!" yells Giampiero as a speedboat rockets by and we bob in its wake, as does a fishing boat trawling for squid and tuna. I now know a few choice Italian swear words. Then we head back to base. It's 2pm and surely time for a siesta.



casual Seascape terrace diner: "As big as Tasmania." Let's just blame the swooning effect of that noonday sun.

The tag "lifestyle" stays, too. It's used too liberally in the hotel industry but Casa Angelina delivers the goods. There's an easy, breezy flow to the communal areas, where the decor features items you'd expect in a millionaire's mansion. There are towering piles of linen-covered Assouline volumes on enticing destinations, abstract sculptures and Murano glass works and canvases from the owner's private collection, which add jolts of carnival colours. I overhear American guests talking about the "Hamptons-style decor" but this is not Long Island. It feels unequivocally Italian. Cue the lemon-laden pergola by the pool, the fact accommodation categories are dubbed Romantic or Relaxing, the friggittelli and grilled mozzarella popping up for lunch, the roving gelato cart, those unasked-for extras that appear by magic to make guests feel "at home". And by "extras", I mean an array of little extravagances, including a choice of bathroom amenities (L'Occitane or Jo Malone, signora?), the bespoke fragrance that subtly wafts through the property in gusts of sandalwood and citrus, the provision of la dolce vita-ready totes, sunscreen and slip-on footwear to venture to the beach club below.

The chambers range from 23sq m to 60sq m, are all ice-white, including the herringbone ceramic tiled floors, wafty curtains, Etro bed linen and gowns, timber furniture and bedheads made by Sorrento craftsmen. Bright shots of aquamarine in cushions and cashmere throws enliven the decor. Look, a single blue hydrangea here; a bowl of green grapes there. The most desirable accommodation comes with terraces, some are suites, and the newest corner room style features a

huge walk-in wardrobe and loads of storage. All have Bang & Olufsen TVs, Philippe Starck bathroom fittings, and turn-down treats that include best-quality chocolates and little hand creams.

Breakfast is taken at Un Piano nel Cielo, the "suspended between sea and sky" top-floor indoor-outdoor venue that slinks into fine dining guise at night as a showcase for executive chef Leopoldo Elefante's assured contemporary Neapolitan cuisine, served a la carte or as a tasting menu of morsels that burst with flavour. The morning spread can be taken until a leisurely 11am, negating any need for lunch. Inhale the scent of garden-fresh basil, eye off the zucchini flowers, start with white fig yoghurt, sugar-dusted pastries of the day and warm breads, then segue to the spreads of cheese, meat and smoked fish, olives, bowls of berries ready to be drizzled with honey, proper big cakes (not puny breakfast bakes), and cooked-to-order crepes and eggs. Liberally splash about Il Mulino della Signora extra virgin olive oil, a little tin of which is given to all departing guests.

Then there's a wellness spa, gym, heated indoor hydrotherapy pool in the fitness area, and the services of personal trainers, and pilates and yoga instructors. But from my observations, most saluting to the sun manoeuvres take place in the Seascape Cocktail Bar, where limoncello mojitos are raised as that fiery orb doesn't so much set as dissolve gently into the sea. Driving back to Naples, all switchbacks and spiralling turns, I listen to Casa Angelina's "guest music" app on Spotify. Louis Prima is clowning it up in Angelina Zooma, I sing along, plotting my next visit to Praiano.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Casa Angelina.