



# The Gallivanter's Guide

## 100 CLUB

HONEST ADVICE FOR THE WORLD'S TOP TRAVELLERS

*Spectacular views of Rome, from Il Giardino's terrace, at Hotel Eden.*



*The Small Tour of Italy.*

Most of us these days do not have the time to take The Grand Tour of Europe, which flourished from the mid 17th Century to the 1840s; a rite of passage for wealthy young men and the occasional chaperoned women. Italy was a highlight for many, and this has barely changed, as there are few European countries so immersed in ancient history. Thus, with our hearts set on discovery; albeit of hotels rather than life experiences, we bring you The Small Tour of Italy; a tranquil journey, from the best hotel in Rome to Sicily's latest grand restorations. Buon viaggio!

### **Hotel Eden, Rome.**

When in Rome, do as the Romans do and escape from Fiumicino airport as fast as you possibly can (if you manage to find the exit, that is). OK, I am being slightly over dramatic here, but, in my view, it works much better as a fashion destination than as a fully functioning airport.

I was, therefore, thrilled to finally set foot inside the opulent yet intimate lobby of Hotel Eden, after snaking past a crowd of well-behaved fans of a famous American actor who was in residence at the hotel.

This iconic property, which opened in 1899, has had a long tradition of hosting glamorous movie stars, such as Ingrid Bergman, who once lived here.

Check-in was swift, warm, and person-

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At Hotel Eden, the sitting room of the blissfully quiet Classic Suite, #410.

alised, and since my suite was not quite ready, I was offered, very graciously, a drink in the lobby, where I met, briefly, with the excellent General Manager, Luca Virgilio, who has been at the helm since 2013, when Dorchester Collection assumed management.

In 2017, Hotel Eden was revamped by Bruno Moinard and Claire Bétaille of 4BI & Associates, and the sleek result, inspired by the Eternal City, is splendid. The reception and concierge desks are made of intricately sculpted slabs of marble, inspired by the altar of peace in Rome's Ara Pacis Museum, and if you look closely at the lobby's black and white marble floors, you will see that they comprise a modern interpretation of those in the Pantheon. Meanwhile, the adjacent Libreria, which is the ground floor

lounge, beckons with delicate hand-painted frescoes by Roman artist, Giovanni Bressana, alongside fabulous, framed drawings by Andrea Ferolla, the hotel's own in-house artist, who excels at capturing scenes of hotel life.

During the renovation, the number of rooms and suites was reduced from 121 to

98, including 32 Suites; many of which are interconnecting. It is important to insist on a room with a view, as you do not want to be facing the inner courtyard or end up in a room on a lower floor. Equally, the sybaritic bathrooms come in various combinations; some with separate showers, others with a tub/shower combo, or with showers



Exterior of Hotel Eden, Rome.



A roomy Junior Suite, #309, at Hotel Eden.



*Sitting room of a bright and airy Prestige Suite, #308, at Hotel Eden.*

only, so keep that in mind when you book.

An airy Prestige Room with a view, such as #206, is of a very high standard and is extremely acceptable; this with a seriously

good bathroom with tub and separate shower, as well as a Juliet balcony overlooking the hotel's porte-cochère.

Even better are the roomier Junior Suites,

such as #309, which feature bijou sitting areas and working desks.

I stayed in a blissfully quiet and beautifully finished Classic Suite, #410. This corner habitat features a small separate sitting area with large windows overlooking the Villa Borghese gardens and boasts cinematic views of Rome.

The chic décor is classic, with sumptuous Rubelli drapes, watercolours depicting the city of Rome, old prints and books; some of which date from the hotel's early days. There are plenty of beautiful details, such as wardrobes lined with toile de Jouy, reminiscent of Grand Tour luggage trunks, Murano glass lampshades, and architectural details by Palladio and Piranesi, which add a sense of the residential. Inspired by Roman baths, my white marble and mosaic bathroom, with its brushed gold fixtures, deep tub, large walk-in shower and Bottega Veneta amenities, was superb.

Technology works well, with user-friendly tablets which have several pre-determined settings, allowing you to request pretty much everything, from your preferred time for turndown, to ice buckets, or restaurants and Spa bookings. The suite also had two B&O televisions with Bluetooth sound systems, as well as a Chromecast streaming system. The only jarring detail in my eyes, for an hotel that prides itself to be 100% Italian, was the presence of a Nespresso



*At Hotel Eden, the sitting room of The Villa Medici Suite, #508, which has six balconies.*



At Hotel Eden, Michelin-starred, La Terrazza restaurant is wreathed in views.

machine on top of the upscale minibar.

Further up the scale are the bright and airy Prestige Suites, such as #308, which offer spacious living areas with dining tables, seating four, together with roomy walk-in closets.

If you crave more space, opt for one of the four Signature Suites, such as the 1,345 sq.ft Villa Medici Suite, #508, which features no less than six balconies, a private cocktail bar and a spacious living room; ideal if you are looking to entertain. This suite also features a good-sized bedroom and a light-filled marble bathroom affording fabulous panoramic views of Rome.

I loved the unashamedly contemporary rooftop Bellavista Penthouse Suite, which feels like having your own Roman apartment. Accessed by private elevator and dec-

orated in shades of beige, orange and crimson, it is refreshingly modern and a real departure from the classic look of the rest of the hotel. Despite the absence of bal-

conies, it offers sensational wraparound views of the Eternal City from every angle. The open plan living/dining room features a stunning gallery wall, showcasing origi-



At Hotel Eden, the excellent all-day-dining, Il Giardino restaurant.



At Hotel Eden, Rome, Il Giardino and its small but viewsome terrace; and a taste of La Terrazza's elegant Michelin-starred cuisine.

nal artwork and antique maps, whilst the viewsome bathroom, with its round tub, is suitably decadent.

Another option that I did not get to see is the coveted 1-bedroom Aurora Terrace Suite, #201, which features a unique landscaped outdoor terrace, with loungers and a dining area for up to ten people.





At Hotel Eden, you are tempted to linger in Il Giardino restaurant, thanks to its extraordinary vistas of Rome.

On the 6th floor, you will find a bar as well as two superb rooftop restaurants with postcard-perfect views of the city, splendidly designed by Patrick Jouin and Sanjit

Manku. Il Giardino is a contemporary all-day dining brasserie, with floor to ceiling windows, wooden flooring, an olive tree in its middle, and a small but attractive ter-

race. The cuisine is first-rate in every way, from an excellent breakfast buffet complemented by cook-to-order dishes, to a very tempting lunch and dinner menu, including modern interpretations of classic Italian cuisine, together with some excellent wines by the glass.

For a slice of la dolce vita, head for the adjacent Il Giardino Bar, where a stunning abstract vertical garden, crafted from glass and metal foliage, is displayed on one wall of the bar area. Sink into a comfy leather sofa, gaze at the panoramic views and treat yourself to an aperitivo, with some hot or cold cicchettis; the Italian version of Spanish tapas.

Do not fret if you do not secure a window table at the elegant Michelin-starred La Terrazza, as Rome is, surprisingly, not well lit at night, and frankly, the real lure is what happens in the kitchen, where a window allows you to see the chefs at work from your table.

Chef, Fabio Ciervo adds just the right amount of theatre and flair to his creations, and the result is certainly worth his Michelin star. In addition to two well-balanced tasting menus, you can also opt for à la carte. Some of the standout dishes of my meal included an amuse bouche of creamy artichokes and shrimp cubes, and an ultra-original main course of codfish, pizzaiolo-style.

There is a very comprehensive wine list,



La Libreria Bar, Hotel Eden's inviting ground floor lounge.



*The contemporary Bellavista Penthouse Suite is the ultimate Roman apartment, at Hotel Eden, Rome.*

and I liked the fact that I was served the excellent Italian Fillete mineral water, a nice change from Nestlé's ubiquitous San Pellegrino and Acqua Panna.

Then there is the bijou Libreria, the all-day dining lounge which serves light fare and cocktails, and metamorphoses, upon occasion, into the Piccolo Cinema Eden, the hotel's own private screening room.

There were no staffing issues here due to Covid-19, as management, very sensibly, kept everyone on payroll during the pandemic. Consequently, you find yourself dealing with a joyous team of thoughtful, highly attentive and jovial professionals; many of whom have been here for years.

For example, when one of the restaurant waiters noticed that I was using a Mandarin

Oriental pen, he replaced it, humorously, with a brand-new Hotel Eden version, still wrapped in plastic.

The thoughtfulness of the staff is second to none. My white wine, ordered by the glass, was poured progressively to keep it at a perfect temperature, whilst housekeeping left a wine-saver stopper by my welcome bottle of Prosecco.



*The bathroom of the Bellavista Penthouse Suite, at Hotel Eden, Rome.*



*View from Seaview Suite, #230, at Grand Hotel Villa Igiea, in Palermo.*

The small, yet perfectly designed Eden Spa features a blow-dry bar, three treatment suites, including a couple's suite; all with their own showers and steam baths. The main brand is Sonya Dakar, alongside the more interesting Mei for essential oils, as well as Philosophica Botanica for the Gua Sha Facelift Ritual, which originates from traditional Chinese medicine and uses stones, such as jade, to help stimulate the lymphatic system.

Elsewhere, there is a small, well equipped Technogym fitness room, and in summer, the hotel teams up with the exclusive

Roma Polo Club with its splendid outdoor swimming pool.

There is also a very good concierge team, which can organise anything from pizza making classes to private tours of the catacombs or a helicopter and sailing tour of the small islands of Ponzi and Palmarola.

I like the Eden's relatively quiet location on Via Ludovisi, between the Borghese gardens and the Via Veneto. You are just a few minutes from the Spanish Steps, yet well away from the hordes.

Hotel Eden is the ultimate Roman hide-away, with a warm and exclusive atmos-

phere. Truly, it felt like a home away from home and I certainly wished I could have stayed longer.

[dorchestercollection.com](http://dorchestercollection.com)

*Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★*

### **Grand Hotel Villa Igiea, Palermo, Sicily.**

Truth to be told, Palermo, with its non-descript urban sprawl, does not go easy on the eye. Indeed, the city is more often associated with organised crime than with a serene holiday destination, which is a pity,



*View of the pool and the harbour beyond, at Grand Hotel Villa Igiea, in Palermo, Sicily.*



*Sitting room of Seaview Suite, #230, at Grand Hotel Villa Igia, Palermo.*

as Sicily's largest city is a cultural melting pot, filled with exotic souk-like markets, crumbling Art Nouveau mansions, breathtaking Arab-Norman historical sights and

striking examples of Baroque architecture. In the early 20th Century, Villa Igia, with its unparalleled seaside location, perched on a rocky promontory just outside town,



*At Grand Hotel Villa Igia, bedroom of George V Suite, #101.*

was a favourite hotspot of European glitterati, who arrived here by boat during their Grand Tour of Italy. Initially built as a sanatorium in 1900, by the Florio family, this neo-Gothic folly was transformed into an hotel; expanded, and renovated in Liberty style by pioneering Art Nouveau architect, Ernesto Basile.

Sadly, the glamorous heyday of Grand Hotel Villa Igia was short-lived. The hotel became a hospital throughout the World Wars and only regained its status in the 1950s, as a sanctuary for the rich and famous, who flocked once again to the balmy shores of Palermo.

This was followed by a long and steady decline until 2019, when Rocco Forte bought the iconic Grade 1 listed landmark and renovated it under the watchful eye of his sister, Olga Polizzi, alongside interior design-



*Extraordinary detail, at Grand Hotel Villa Igia.*

ers, Moschino and Vergeylen, of Nicholas Haslam Studios. Whilst the public areas were carefully restored, the rooms were completely reimagined, and their number reduced from 120 to 100.

The new, very residential décor works splendidly and incorporates classic elements inspired by the works of Basile, as well as antiques, canopied beds, soaring ceilings, rattan furniture, parquet, sumptuous fabrics in blue, gold and sage Hessian, and hand painted wallpapers by the world-famous San Patrignano community, which all merge to exquisite effect with striking contemporary pieces.

Because of the hotel's unique layout, no two rooms are alike, and even in a single category, the accommodation differs great-



*The Igiea Terrazza Bar, at Grand Hotel Villa Igiea, which opens onto an arched patio and terrace.*

ly. For example, it is important to note that many, but not all rooms and suites, boast French balconies, large enough for two chairs and a small table; so make sure to state your preferences when you book. Right now, the terraces of some rooms, which are fitted with loungers, sunbeds, dining tables and umbrellas, could do with more privacy, but by next summer, this should have been resolved.

I stayed in a compact, yet perfectly formed Suite Seaview, #222, featuring a sitting room with a chocolate semi-curved sofa, dark wooden floors, and a geometric aquamarine rug area. The airy bedroom boasted a splendid kingsize, adorned with soft Italian linens, as well a small desk and a

rattan chair. A cosy walk-in closet connects the bedroom to an attractive bathroom, fit-



*Locally inspired fare, at Grand Hotel Villa Igiea.*

ted with Carrara marble, hand-painted tiled floors, a deep tub alongside a large walk-

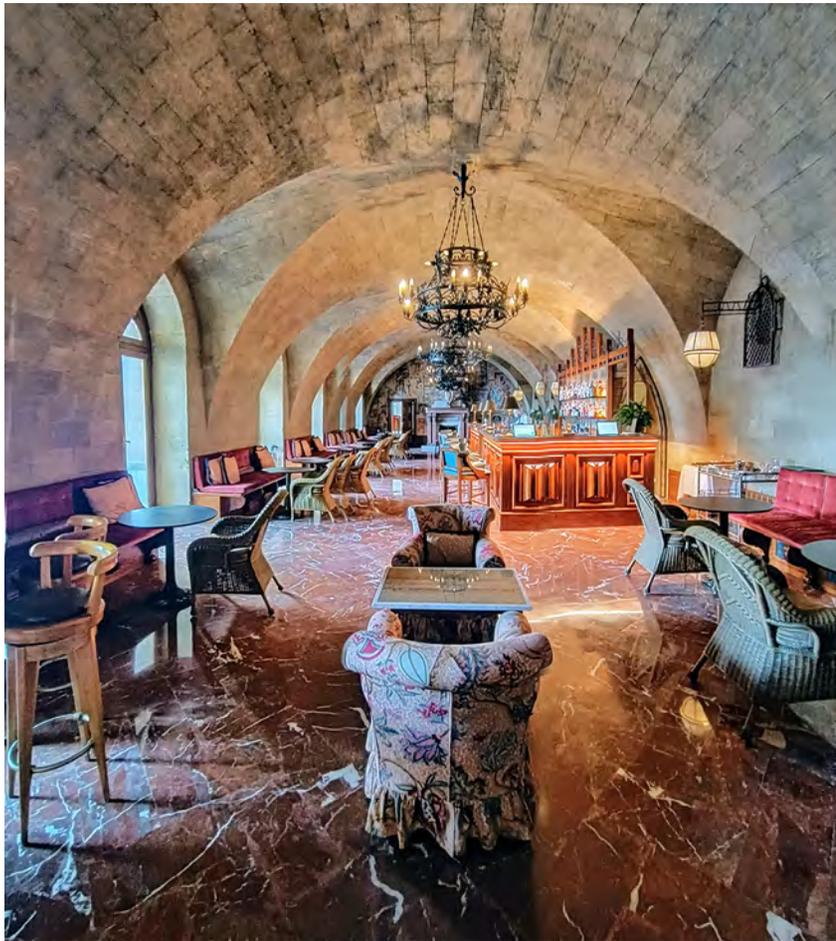
in shower; but no separate loo. My favourite feature of this suite was the French balcony which affords sublime views of the hotel grounds and Palermo Bay.

My best-loved suite is the Seaview Suite, #230, which has a wraparound French balcony, with stupendous views of the pool, gardens, and the deep blue Tyrrhenian Sea. Another favourite is the identical ground floor Seaview Suite, # 018, which instead of a balcony offers a vast furnished terrace, steps away from the pool.

I also saw the signature George V Suite, #101, which features a large living area, a humongous terrace and a vast bedroom with a roomy walk-in closet. This Suite is ideal for families, as it connects with a particu-



*The gorgeous terrace of the Terrazza Bar, at Grand Hotel Villa Igiea.*



*Suite detail, at Grand Hotel Villa Igiea.*  
ters, local grilled fish and sashimi.

You do not stay in a Rocco Forte property for its gourmet cuisine, and with the exception of a top-notch buffet breakfast, which was the best I had on this trip, the cuisine, overseen by the charismatic Creative Director of Food for Rocco Forte Hotels, Chef Fúlvio Pierangeli, who is often seen wandering around the tables, did not fully convince me, and I found it best to stick to simple pasta dishes and Sicilian specialties.

The hotel offers a modestly-sized swimming pool set in carefully manicured gardens, surrounded by stylish loungers and

*At Grand Hotel Villa Igiea, the historic Terrazza Bar Igiea.*  
larly attractive Seaview Suite with terrace, #102, decorated in pretty shades of blue.

Two more suites, including the top end Dona Franca signature suite, with its breezy sea view terrace, are housed in an annex next door but were not finished at time of writing.

There are 3 dining venues; my favourite being the atmospheric Igiea Terrazza Bar, with its sandstone vaulted ceilings and frescoes dating from the 1950s. The bar, which looks particularly splendid at night when lit with candles, opens onto an arched patio, and a terrace cascading towards the brilliant blue sea. The atmosphere is quiet and serene and is perfect for a light lunch or for a traditional Italian Aperitivo at sunset.

The more formal Florio restaurant is housed in the splendid Louis XVI Hall, with its floor to ceiling windows, white panelled walls and potted palms, which, in summer, spills onto a romantic terrace.

The alfresco Alicetta Pool Bar, which is set in an enclosed metal pavilion modelled on the design of the famed Palazzo Butera, was unfortunately closed for the season. It specialises in Italian favourites, seafood plat-



*At Grand Hotel Villa Igiea, Florio restaurant is housed in the splendid Louis XVI Hall.*



*The modestly-sized pool, at Grand Hotel Villa Igia, set in carefully manicured gardens.*

even a picturesque temple ruin. There is no beach, but the hotel has its own pier and there are talks of organising a water taxi service to Palermo, as well as a regular shuttle service to the city centre.

The two-storey Irene Forte Spa, which includes a Technogym wellness room, is adjacent to the Igia marina, which is a stroll from the main building. It is a very attractive facility, with 4 treatment rooms including a couple's suite; all with private showers and indoor/outdoor relaxation areas.

Impressively, the service, under General Manager, Vito Giglio, was already highly polished, from the genuinely helpful and unwaveringly friendly receptionists, to the experienced and highly attentive waiters in the various bars and restaurants.

I loved this hotel. It is a destination in its own right and is a great option for a long



*Grand Hotel Villa Igia spa suite.*

weekend or a starting point for a Sicilian vacation. I felt extremely relaxed here, and for a couple of days the weight of the

world completely evaporated. Do go.

[roccofortehotels.com](http://roccofortehotels.com)

*Gallivanter's Rating: ★★★★★*

**Four Seasons Taormina  
at San Domenico Palace, Sicily.**

Early Autumn is usually the perfect time of the year to visit Taormina. The summer crowds have departed, the stifling heat is replaced by much more manageable temperatures and the pink bougainvillea and hibiscus are still bursting from balconies in the narrow alleys and gardens of this popular tourist hilltop town.

Taormina is all about superlative views, which are some of the best on the island, encompassing the Ionian Sea, the rocky outcrop of Isola Bella and, of course, the often-smouldering and sometimes erupting Mount



*The exterior of Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace, Sicily.*



*At Four Season Taormina at San Domenico Palace, the terrace of Rosso restaurant.*

Etna, which when you stay at San Domenico Palace feels so close that you can almost touch it.

Perched mid-air on the edge of a cliff, a thousand feet above the sea, the hotel comprises a 14th Century Dominican convent and the Grand Hotel wing, which was added at the end of the 19th Century. There are also two tranquil, lushly planted cloisters, a chapel and fragrant gardens overlooking the sea. This hotel, which opened in 1896, has hosted numerous luminaries and every Hollywood star of the golden age that you can think of.

Four Seasons, who now manage the property, reopened it last July, after an extensive 2-year makeover. If memory serves me

right, the interior design project was initially awarded to Gilles & Boissier, who did such a brilliant job at Mandarin Oriental,



Madrid. For unknown reasons, they were replaced by Italian Architect, Valentina Pis-

ani, whom, allegedly, has ties with Gruppo Statuto, the owners of Four Seasons Milan and Taormina.

The public facilities combine antiquities and architectural relics with contemporary art curated by James Robertson consultants, such as the intriguing, mirrored sculpture that sits in the courtyard entrance.

The understated lobby opens onto the grand cloister, which is now the attractive outdoor area of the Chiostro Bar. Below this, you find the Sala Della Grande Madia, which displays part of the Palace's original artwork collection. It used to be the convent's refectory and is now a striking, yet under-used lounge area that links the Grand Hotel wing with the Convent, as well as a



*The interior area of Rosso, at Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace.*



*Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace, Junior Suite #151.*

passageway between the kitchens and the restaurants; so do not expect to sit here to relax. The Chiostro Bar is also awkwardly positioned at the entrance to the Rosso restaurant, which means that it is equally prone to foot traffic.

Many of the rooms are converted monks' cells, which means that space is at a premium. Unless you opt for one of the speciality suites, you can expect mostly small shower-only bathrooms and limited wardrobe space. There is a myriad of room categories with dozens of different layouts

and configurations, so once again it is important to assess what matters most to you.

I like the atmosphere of the Convent wing, which retains some of its original features, whilst the Liberty-style Grand Hotel wing offers accommodations with expansive terraces; many with plunge pools or jacuzzis.

The look of the 111 rooms and suites is en série, with a palette of neutral colours offset by dark wooden floors, area rugs, marble countertops, burnished mirrors and red, aquamarine, or green cushions adorning the rather uncomfortable creamy sofas.

Generally, I found the décor to be somewhat sterile, and I would like to think that this International modern blandness was deliberately conceived so as not to detract from the endless seascape vistas beyond.

In my eyes, the new décor tends to be more successful in the smaller rooms and suites, such as the Instagrammable Junior Suites with plunge pools.

Conversely, the Royal Suite, #348, despite its huge view-filled terraces, resembles yet another hotel suite-by-numbers, that might as well be in Palm Beach or Milan.



*Private plunge pool of Junior Suite, #151, at Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace .*



*At Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace, the Teatro Suite, #224.*

All the rooms are equipped with large TVs, fast Wifi, Bluetooth radios, well-stocked mini bars, umbrellas, Lorenzo Villoresi bath amenities in large recyclable containers, Illy espresso machines, electric blinds, and refreshingly guest-friendly controls.

Opt at least for a Sea View Junior Suite with terrace, such as #150 in the Grand Hotel wing. It is, of course, tempting to choose one of the attractive Junior Suites with private plunge pool, such as #151. However, since the pools are not heated, I would only recommend this category in the hotter months of July and August. Whilst not particularly large, the high ceilings and clever use of mirrors in these Junior Suites make them look much bigger than they are. Their spacious terraces are privatised with walls of striking Maiolica

tiles and are furnished with loungers, dining tables and large umbrellas.

My favourite suite is the 969 sq.ft. Princesse Cecile Suite, #201, on the first floor of the Convent wing. It has more character than most, and despite not having expansive terraces, it features three narrow balconies, with breathtaking views of the sea and the gardens from its gorgeous bathroom, and of the Greek theatre from both the bedroom and the sitting room. This suite also features an elegant entrance foyer with an aquamarine velvet banquette, together with a mirrored wall that conceals a wardrobe and a connecting door to a Sea View Premium room.

I also liked the smaller Teatro Suites, particularly, #224 and #222, which have a slightly more residential feel and feature

roomy furnished terraces with jacuzzis, and stupendous panoramas. Less interesting is the slightly larger Teatro Suite, #249, in the Grand Hotel wing, which is more tradition-



*Detail, at Four Seasons Taormina.*

al in style and layout and features a large covered terrace with great sea views.

I was surprised that the Etna Suite, #112, which despite being in the Convent wing, has not one iota of character. Saying that, I like its large and viewsome grey-and-white bathroom, and I am sure that waking up every morning to a view of Mount Etna must be quite an experience. I was equally underwhelmed by the meandering San Dom-



*At Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace, bedroom of Teatro Suite, #224.*



*The viewsome pool, at Four Seasons Taormina at San Domenico Palace.*

enico Suite, #140, with its triangular dining room, arched bifora window and expansive terrace with plunge pool.

There are three restaurants and a bar to choose from, although during my stay, only one was open, as management decided to close the property two weeks earlier than originally planned, due to low occupancy.

Aside from room service and the very limited bar menu, the all-day-dining restaurant, Rosso, was the only option available to me. Despite the fact that the cuisine of Etna-born Executive Chef, Massimo Mantarro was superb, I was at the end of my Small Tour of Italy and would have appreciated a few alternatives to Italian food. Saying that, Rosso's expansive terrace, with its wondrous sweeping views of the sea and Mount Etna, is a sensational spot to start the day; the breakfast buffet, laid out in an adjoining room, a real treat.

Anciovi, the open-air poolside option, specialises in Mediterranean seafood and Sicilian sushi, together with a raw bar, whilst Principe de Cerami, the fine dining restaurant, is named after the nobleman who converted the Convent into an hotel, and is once again decorated in a rather undistinguished contemporary style.

The star attraction of the hotel is its new infinity-edge swimming pool, wreathed in breathtaking seascapes. Interestingly, it was constructed above the existing pool, which has been preserved to become the indoor pool of Spa Botanica, which is currently being constructed, and is slated to open next year.

I do not have any details about treat-

ments and products, so I am crossing my fingers for a chemical-free option.

Back in the Grand Hotel wing, there is a very well-equipped fitness facility with the latest Technogym equipment, and by next summer, guests will have access to a near-



by Beach Club; a welcome bonus, as the main pool is not particularly large.

I found that service, under General Manager, Lorenzo Maraviglia, was, on the whole, not up to the usual high standards of Four Seasons. This could have been due to the fact that management, together with some staff, had already left the building in anticipation of the hotel's imminent closure for the winter season.

Nonetheless, everybody was very pleasant, particularly the concierge and the reception team; but in the restaurant, service

was frustratingly slow and inattentive. I often had to wait to receive a menu or to attract someone's attention. Either that, or I would be handed a menu, without being asked what I wanted to order. On several occasions, I spotted trays left unattended in the corridors, whilst some requests via the app were occasionally forgotten.

I was also expecting a tad more from Housekeeping after we suffered a volcanic eruption and Etna rained ashes for about one hour. My terrace and plunge pool were rendered unusable, and although I did not expect a full clean up, having someone dusting it at some point would have been welcomed. Equally, receiving some form of reassurance from reception about what was going on would have been appreciated. I mean, we all know what happened in Pompeii.

Expectations were high when Four Seasons took over San Domenico Palace, and this Canadian group seemed to be the perfect contender to rise to the challenge of restoring luster to this legendary property. There is no denying the memorable cuisine and the extraordinary setting; however, the largely pedestrian contemporary décor, together with the somewhat disappointing service missed the mark and left me wanting.

Judging by its recent new openings, I am beginning to think that Four Seasons is, to an extent, losing its magic touch, and it will be interesting to see how the hotel performs once it reopens again next season.

[fourseasons.com](http://fourseasons.com)

**Gallivanter's Rating: ✓✓✓+**



Gallivanter's

# Gossip

**I KNOW THAT WE DO NOT NORMALLY COVER CRUISES** but, compared to the rest, **Aqua Expeditions** are the nearest you can get to floating Amanresorts! Their new **Aqua Mare** vessel is the first proper superyacht to venture into the **Galapagos Islands**, beginning May 6th 2022 (see right), with two extremely personalised 7-night itineraries and two 14-night voyages of adventure. With just 7 individually designed suites, by François Zuretti, the Owner's Suite (see right) is the largest ever seen in the islands and, without doubt, the most elegant. [aquapexpeditions.com](http://aquapexpeditions.com)



**WITH THE REOPENING OF THAILAND** the first place to head is **The Siam Bangkok**, set on the banks of the glorious Chao Phraya River, and reopening as I write. Their new **Story House** restaurant meanders from room to room and out onto the airy terrace (see right); a different personality and vibe in each dining room, to cater to your every whim. I love this small, exquisitely managed hotel, which also has the best chemical-free Spa I know. [thesiamhotel.com](http://thesiamhotel.com)



**IF YOU ARE HEADING FOR IRELAND** then watch out for the opening in March 2022 of the stunningly renovated **Cashel Palace Hotel**, under the expert General Manager, Adriaan Bartels. There have been no compromises made here; the level of investment quite breathtaking, so definitely one for your list. [cashelpalacehotel.ie](http://cashelpalacehotel.ie)

**IF YOU STRUGGLE TO GET EXCITED** about the high-end hotels in Toronto, then check out the recently opened **The 1 Hotel Toronto**. With just 102 stunningly designed rooms and suites, this eco-friendly hotel is in the fashionable King West Village, downtown. Expect organic cotton linens, the beautiful use of reclaimed wood, floor to ceiling windows and unusually good service. [1hotels.com](http://1hotels.com)

**SOMETHING NEW TO THINK ABOUT** in the Caribbean is **Oil Nut Bay** on Virgin Gorda in the **British Virgin Islands**. It is not a resort in the traditional sense, but is a collection of high-end rental homes, set on a 400-acre site, ringed with white sand beaches. Only accessible by boat or helicopter, this is the ultimate Caribbean escape, with villas, ranging from one to six bedrooms. Operated by ex-Amanresorts, Dan Reid, this super private enclave has its own Marina and a number of tempting Food & Beverage outlets. Private chefs and butlers are also on the menu, of course. [oilnutbay.com](http://oilnutbay.com)

**SEASONS' GREETINGS TO YOU ALL!** David, Philippe and I send you all our heartfelt thanks for your support over these difficult times, and for the superb feedback we have received from those of you who have continued to travel. In 2022, watch out for our **January Award's Issue**, which highlights your positive experiences of the year's hotels and resorts; then follow us as we explore the world's latest openings....

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