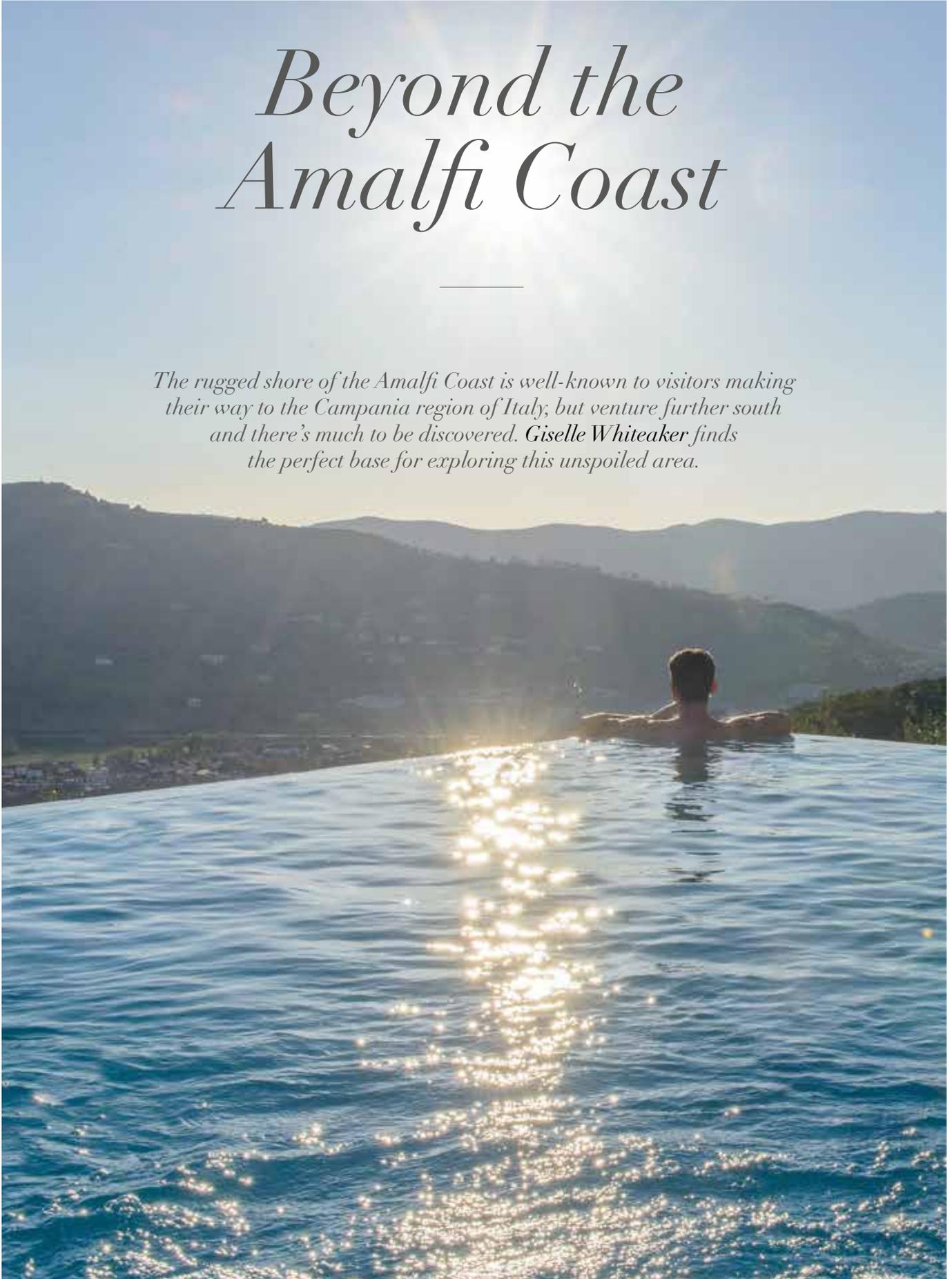


Beyond the Amalfi Coast

The rugged shore of the Amalfi Coast is well-known to visitors making their way to the Campania region of Italy, but venture further south and there's much to be discovered. Giselle Whiteaker finds the perfect base for exploring this unspoiled area.



Above: The heated pool at The Pinelli Estate has spectacular views.



The Pinelli Estate's Porsche Cayenne squeezes through the narrow streets of the historic quarter of Naples, slowing for pedestrians who pad across the cobblestones, seemingly oblivious of traffic. It's a relief when we reach the motorway, Mount Vesuvius on our left as we head south towards the Cilento Coast.

"This is Salerno," says Nigel Carley, owner of The Pinelli Estate, gesturing towards the window. Rumour has it that Ryanair may soon be flying into the airport here, perfect for visitors wanting to bypass the chaos of Naples.

Gliding along the road, Nigel's enthusiasm for this part of Italy is palpable. He points out fields of vegetables, ripening under the Italian sun. It's artichoke season, and crates are sold by the roadside. "Buffalo sheds," he says, pointing to some tin roofs in the middle of a field of grass being grown as Buffalo fodder. Buffalo here live a coddled existence, explaining Campania's reputation for fine buffalo mozzarella cheese.



Before long, we are winding through the hills, past tumbledown stone buildings that make me dream of renovation. The Pinelli Estate was once one of these – "Il Rifugio", the property on the estate, which covers 18 acres of rolling hills, was a traditional local farm building with over ten generations of Italian owners. It dates back almost 300 years, but suffered from neglect in its latter years. Nigel and his soon-to-be-wife Dawn's tender ministrations have brought the home back to life, in spectacular fashion.

Local stone, aged birch wooden beams, shuttered windows and terracotta roof tiles reinforce the classic Italian architecture. My friend Katy and I are ushered into the upper level through thick wooden doors. Four double en-suite bedrooms are on this level, featuring exposed brick, timber beams and extravagant touches – chandeliers, ornate mirrors, and bold bedside lamps. Downstairs, there's a cosy lounge room and a snug that leads onto the kitchen and dining area and out to a terrace that overlooks the heated infinity pool. "The Jacuzzi was delivered today," says Nigel, pointing past the pool where three workmen surround the large hot tub. "We should have it working by the end of the day."



Past the pool, olive trees lead down the hillside, making way for a spectacular view. Lush green hills roll across the horizon and down in the valley, where a train chugs over the lengthy railway bridge on the outskirts of Agropoli. A triangle of sea marks the furthest boundary of the summer resort town. It's breath-taking and only the appeal of a Mediterranean lunch of fresh Buffalo mozzarella, green olives, prosciutto, ruby-red tomatoes and crusty bread drags our eyes from the spectacle.

Nigel and Dawn are keen to show us to the highlights of the area, of which there are many. We drive by Agropoli Marina, where houses perch on the cliff-top like sentinels of the sea. In Paestum, founded by the Greek Achaeans around 600BC and less than 20 minutes' drive away, we eat gelato while we admire some of the best-preserved ancient



Top: Agropoli Marina.

Middle: Dusk at San Marco di Castellabate.

Above: Santa Maria Di Castellabate.



Clockwise from top left: Looking over the pool to Il Rifugio; the cosy snug; each room has a quirky element; the terrace is the perfect spot for dining al fresco.

Greek temples in the world. We drive the winding road to San Marco di Castellabate to watch the lights twinkle on along the coast, before feasting on fresh seafood from Ristorante Cuopperia Lo Sparviero in Santa Maria Di Castellabate, at a table on the boardwalk, overlooking the golden-sand beach.

The cuisine in the area exemplifies the Italian ethos of simple and farm-fresh. At Tenuta Vannulo we visit the buffalo sheds, where the enormous beasts chew happily on hay. "See that?" asks Nigel, pointing to a contraption inside the pens that looks like a dry car wash. "It's a scratching device," he explains, and we watch a buffalo roll its eyes in delight as it rubs against the brushes. These contented animals provide milk for around 400 kilograms of unpasteurised *mozzarella di bufala* per day. Naturally, lunch at Vannulo incorporates enormous globes of the fresh cheese.

We only have a short time here, not long enough to follow in Hemingway's footsteps – the writer spent time in the small fishing village of Acciaroli along the coast in 1952 after he'd finished writing *The Old Man and the Sea*. Nor do we explore the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Sassi Di

Matera, where the houses are dug into the rock. We leave the Cilento National Park untouched and do not board the Pinelli's captained motor yacht, on hand for trips along the coast, should guests fancy lunch in Capri.

Instead, we explore the nearby villages and long for more, spending our final hours at the Pinelli Estate, which has fast become our Italian home. We trial the now-operational hot tub, luxuriating in the afternoon sun, and fire up the barbecue on the terrace. It's the perfect, relaxing idyll.

On the drive back to the airport, we are silent, lost in dreams. "You ought to dream," said Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*. Perhaps he was thinking of the Pinelli Estate and the Cilento Coast, Italy's best kept secrets. ■

Rental of Il Rifugio, the fully renovated Italian farmhouse, is on a whole house, whole week basis. Alternatively, through fractional ownership, you can be one of an exclusive group of owners, each with a 10% share in a company where you collectively own Il Rifugio.

See www.thepinelliestate.com for details.

Enjoy fantastic views year-round with these hilltop homes for sale.



Castellgali, Spain

This Catalan fully-refurbished country house has spectacular views of the mountain of Montserrat. Located in Castellgali, close to Manresa and 45 minutes from Barcelona, it is surrounded by nature and green spaces. The property counts five double bedrooms, all with built-in closets, four bathrooms, and an apartment with independent access. The home enjoys seven hectares of land, a swimming pool and gardens.

Price: 1,090,000€

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Mandelieu-la-Napoule, France

This beautifully maintained mid-century modern villa has beautiful views over the mountains. It is in pristine condition, offering the luxury of modern-day living and elegant living spaces that put open-plan living and light at the forefront. The property has five bedrooms and five bathrooms, a tennis court, swimming pool and car port. Although it has fantastic rural views, it is only 25 minutes from the airport, a 10-minute drive from the town centre, and a short drive to the beach.

Price: 2,250,000 €

Fine & Country Cannes

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Porto, Portugal

Quinta das Quebradas is a country estate located in a quiet area on the right bank of the Douro River. This 400m² house has six en suite bedrooms, a living room and dining room with fireplaces, a kitchen and a covered veranda running along the living areas, with views of the Douro River, the vineyard and forest. It is on a seven hectare plot with vines that produces grapes for vinho verde (young wine), with a variety of olive trees, orchards, orange groves and forest in an area ideal for walks.

Price: POA

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