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# The Fortress That Italian And International Jetsetters Must See

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D by La Repubblica





By *Amalia Zordan*

Michelangelo was one of its first illustrious visitors. He must have watched his block of marble from Carrara apprehensively as it crossed the swamp to the Ligurian Sea, on its way to Rome by boat. And things must have ended then and there, as there wasn't even so much as a shack. Forte dei Marmi then arose and found its name thanks to the fort commissioned by Grand Duke Leopold in the late eighteenth century to protect the landing place for ships and the open-air deposit for incoming blocks of marble (Massa Carrara is around the corner). At the end of the nineteenth century, rulers and upper bourgeoisie declared it a resort area and in the early twentieth century, philosophers, artists and poets arrived. From the 1960s on, a bright and merry community, rich and hedonistic, transformed Forte dei Marmi into a place where everyone wants to vacation. A bit like today. You might take a taxi to the center of Forte, an obstacle course of narrow high-walled streets lined with tall maritime pines, and with the allure of exclusivity typical of private gardens. Forte dei Marmi is as secret as it is elite. It is nostalgically thrilling to think that Aldous Huxley, Thomas Mann and Luchino Visconti swam in its sea.

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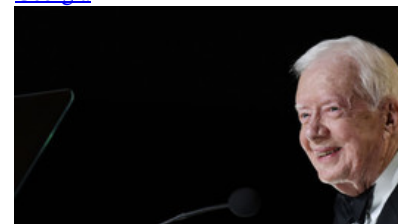
AUGUSTUS HOTEL

To better understand the spirit of the area, there is a unique hotel, the Augustus resort, named after the countess who had a vacation home built there in the 1930s. To offset the “lonely-countess-in-the-pine-woods” effect, Augusta Pesenti constructed a series of villas around hers for the gardener, hairdresser, her best friend and the housekeeper. In the early 1950s, the countess transformed her villa into a luxury hotel and added a floor. A few years later, the hotel manager, Nino Maschietto took over the complex. The main villa was expanded, while the others were purchased one by one. The improvements were steady but not over the top and additions were made in the style of the different periods: the Sixties, the Seventies, the Eighties. Jasmine arches, lavender bushes, wild roses and succulent plants were placed side by side, for an outcome that is not always exemplary. Everything was designed to respect the previous eccentricities. So you might have run into Jimi Hendrix or Charlton Heston having breakfast near frescoes of sailing ships and folkloristic figures.



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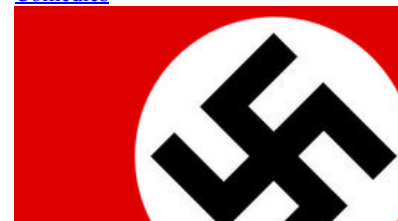
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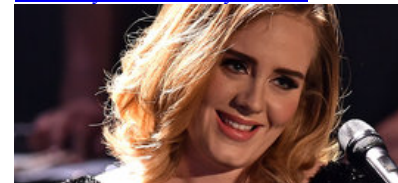
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At Augustus, the hospitality, service and chef are flawless and even affectionate. The tireless Nino Maschietto scored yet again when he bought the neighboring villa of the Agnelli industrialists (yesterday Fiat, today Chrysler), set in a park with a private underpass to the beach. He left the furnishings intact: a treasure trove for lovers of haute bourgeois tastes. In 1969, Vittorio, one of Maschietto's children, a rebellious architecture student, decided to open a bar/restaurant/lounge/nightclub called Bambaissa, located in the former hangar of the Agnelli villa. It was a hit that momentarily overshadowed Capannina, a legendary locale that is still a jetsetter destination only a few hundred meters from Bambaissa. Today it is the location of one of the best restaurants in Versilia.



AUGUSTUS HOTEL

To reach the orderly streets of this small but swanky shopping capital, shuttle service to the center leaves every half hour from the Augustus. Many stop at Caffè Principe, unchanged since the Fifties, and the Caffè Milano, and then go on have a focaccia at Orlando's. And Wednesday, in Piazza Marconi, people explore the stalls of the legendary Forte dei Marmi market.

At the end of the day, you can try Augustus's new wellness center. Designed with an extraordinary partner, Starpool of Ziano di Fiemme, it offers a sauna, Turkish bath and, above all, a Mediterranean spa inspired by ancient Roman baths. Then you can decide: lose weight with chef Gianluca Grosso's wellness menu, or have a buffet of regional products prepared and laid out on the Augustus Lido veranda. You may need a vacation in order to decide.

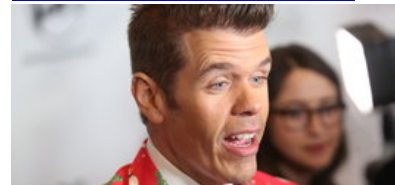
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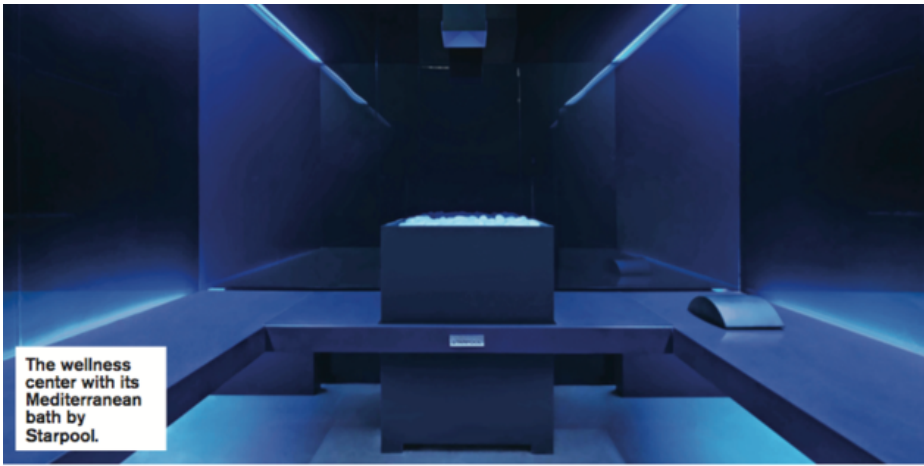
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