



HOME > LIFESTYLE > LIFESTYLE NEWS

## Italy's Answer to St. Tropez: Where to Stay in Forte Dei Marmi on the Tuscan Coast

Renowned for its wide, golden beaches and nightlife scene, the seaside town is a favorite of Andrea Bocelli and Miuccia Prada: "It felt like we were in a movie set of what you'd think the Côte d'Azur was in the 1960s."

BY MARK ELLWOOD MAY 13, 2023 11:15AM



The Augustus Hotel & Resort in Forte dei Marmi, located on the Ligurian Sea about an hour and a half west of Florence. FRANCESCA MOSCHENI/COURTESY OF AUGUSTUS HOTEL & RESORT

It was thirty years ago when Mitchell Hochberg stumbled on Forte dei Marmi. The developer, who's just opened the [Moxy-AC hotels complex in downtown L.A.](#), was driving through Italy on vacation with his wife Susan. "We were basically lost. It was a Saturday afternoon, and we drove into town, and it felt like we were in a make-believe world, a movie set of what you'd think the Côte d'Azur was in the 1960s," he recalls. It was an instant infatuation, and the couple has made near-annual pilgrimages to the Tuscan seaside town ever since.

Though Forte dei Marmi started as a port town — shipping stones for Michelangelo and company from the nearby Carrara marble quarries (its name means "marble fortress") — the town became a tourist hotspot in Italy's dolce vita heyday. Ferocious local zoning laws, and a preference for discretion among the wealthy who vacation there, have kept it largely unchanged since the Agnelli family and other wealthy Milanese turned it into Italy's answer to the Hamptons. And though it's a favorite of Miuccia Prada, Giorgio Armani and Andrea Bocelli, all of whom have homes there, Forte's elegance is low-key — bicycle, not smoky-windowed Escalade, is the default way to get around.





A room at the Augustus Hotel, where doubles start at about \$1,000 a night.

What first lured visitors was the beaches, which are wide, golden and miles-long, far more appealing than the pebbly patches that dot the Amalfi Coast, for example — no wonder Naomi Campbell and Zoe Saldana have been spotted in Forte dei Marmi. Even better, the sands are a few minutes' walk from the center of town, and are quilted with private beach clubs. A day lounging there is a chance to live out a Visconti movie fantasy. Most of these *bagni* are family owned, their signs unchanged since the 1960s — **Piero** is one of the oldest and most prestigious, while **Bambaissa** serves terrific *spaghetti alle arselle*, or little clams, the confetti-like crustacean which is a local specialty.

Bocelli does make rare appearances at **Alpemare**, which he owns, but not often enough for the crowds who flock there in the hope of spotting him. If you want to dawdle on the waterfront for sundowners or supper — or both — try **Gilda**, an upscale restaurant and beach club option on the north edge of town; the sashimi-style shrimp, caught that morning down the coast, are a standout. **Maitó** is scener, with live music and later nights than most of the restaurants there.

Indeed, the beach club vibe isn't the only parallel between Forte and the south of France: the town's nightlife is among the liveliest in the Med: Book a table at **Twiga**, the club on the waterfront owned by Formula One maestro Flavio Briatore, or indulge in some time-warping disco moves at either **Seven Apples** or **La Capannina di Franceschi**, both mainstays of after-hours for decades. Grace Jones has been onstage at the latter.

Name a luxury fashion brand — from Armani to Zegna — and it will likely have an outpost in Forte dei Marmi's town center, which has a Beverly Hills-ish affect, all pale stone and low-slung buildings. More interesting, though, are some of the homegrown offerings: wander into **Magazzini Bracchi**, a sprawling indoor-outdoors interiors showroom selling Italian designware from the likes of Toilet Paper and Zafferano. **RRD** is a Goth-inflected Tuscan-designed unisex brand, while **Patrizia Pepe**'s sparkly, beachy clothes are ideal for a week — or a summer — in Forte. Don't miss **Giovanni del Forte**, the cobbler who makes wedges and mules while you wait, custom fit to your feet, or the weekly markets on Wednesday and Saturday; the stalls there often sell high-end cashmere overruns from the Italian factories that manufacture for the major names — look for **La Marucca**, where the throws and sweaters are top quality.

For accommodation, consider the Chateau Marmont-like **Hotel Augustus** (doubles from around \$1,000 a night; more booking options at **Booking.com**, **Expedia** and **Hotels.com**), a cluster of buildings nestled in its own sprawling garden; there are seven standalone villas on property, available for weekly rental in season — the best is Le Rane, which has its own private pool. The property's just-renovated Augustus Lido annex, built as a mansion by the Agnelli family, offers 25 rooms overlooking the beach; it has the only tunnel under the road by the water, another Agnelli investment in convenience and privacy — no prying paparazzi can spot guests slinking over to the beach club. "Forte dei Marmi is safe place, where you can have incredible privacy, and just relax — that's what it represents," says Giacomo Maschietto, whose family runs the hotel; his mother is designer Chiara Boni. "It's like Palm Beach, with the feeling of St Tropez."

If you'd rather rent or a buy a villa, steer clear of the northern reaches of town around Vittoria Apuana: the properties there are newer, lacking Forte dei Marmi's midcentury charm. Better to look in the original heart of town, the Roma Imperiale neighborhood — work with the bilingual brokers at **Royal Forte** to find a pad: the **six-bedroom Villa Allegra**, set in an almost half-acre garden in that area, is on sale for 7.2 million euros (around \$7.9 million).