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IL SAN PIETRO DI POSITANO: A LUXURY GUIDE TO THE AMALFI COAST

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TRAVEL / INTERNATIONAL

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There is no bad view in Positano – a charming town built into the cliffs of the Amalfi Coast, made up of steep, narrow roads and hairpin curves, scattered with higgledy-piggledy pastel houses, framed with exotic blooms.

Positano is famed for its opulence but unlike its neighbouring Italian sisters, it channels low-key luxe. Heels are impossible on the cobbled paths and precipitous terrain and service is unusually intimate. It inspired both a Rolling Stones song (*Midnight Rambler*) and an essay by John Steinbeck, who wrote in 1953: "Positano bites deep. It is a dream place that isn't quite real when you are there and becomes beckoningly real after you have gone."



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If you are looking for the best panorama in Positano, visit the resplendent Il San Pietro di Positano; a truly enchanting, five-star hideaway on the Amalfi Coast, cantilevered over a cliff located 1km from the main town. The hotel was sculpted into the rock by Carlo Cinque as a spectacular villa in 1970. It took eight years to complete and Cinque's descendents still own the family-run hotel today.

The famed Il San Pietro di Positano sets the bar for luxury in Positano and is positioned below street level for complete privacy. It retains an air of old-school, retro glamour, bolstered by charming staff, who glide the gleaming hallways in white blazers and bow ties. Past patrons include Hollywood icons, Sir Laurence Olivier and Gregory Peck, as well as George Clooney and Julia Roberts.

I visit for dinner at Zass, the Michelin-starred restaurant renowned for its homemade pasta and seafood specialities, paired with vegetables grown in the hotel gardens. Arriving early, we settle in on the frescoed terrace for cocktail hour. It is a setting fit for a fairytale, with Positano's spellbinding sunset on our right and the hotel façade, dripping in magenta bougainvillea and climbing vines, on our left.



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The name, Zass, derives from a Neapolitan translation of the word 'czar', denoting a person with strong character playing a lead role in a small community. It was the playful nickname given to Salvatore Attanasio, grandson of Carlo Clinque, thus indicating the level of impeccable, spirited service and bonhomie that you can expect at this hotel.

The tasting menu elegantly presents masterful versions of local dishes, including freshly caught lobster, tossed with saffron; a dainty fillet of John Dory with black truffle; succulent gnocchi and homemade tagliatelli, paired with local wines from the 600 bottle-strong cellar. We finish with creme brûlée and Neapolitan baba; a light, sweet work of art soaked in Jamaica rum. Exquisite presentation and deft, harmonious flavours in a truly magical setting – Zass certainly has class.



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Away from Il San Pietro di Positano, make the pilgrimage up the 1700-step climb to the lesser-known mountain village of Nocelle, located 400 metres above sea level. (There is also a regular bus from Positano.) Walk The Path of the Gods (Sentiero degli Dei), a name that highlights its serenity and astounding beauty, enveloped by tropical greenery and scented with lemon trees.

Dine out at Il Ristoro degli Dei, a casual but blissfully romantic restaurant set high above Positano, where generous portions are rivalled only by the view; a colourful cacophony during daytime and a seductive, twinkling jewel by night.

■ Il San Pietro di Positano, rooms from €496, www.ilsanpietro.it ↗;