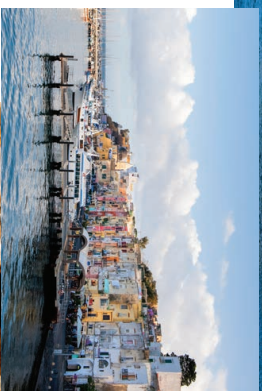
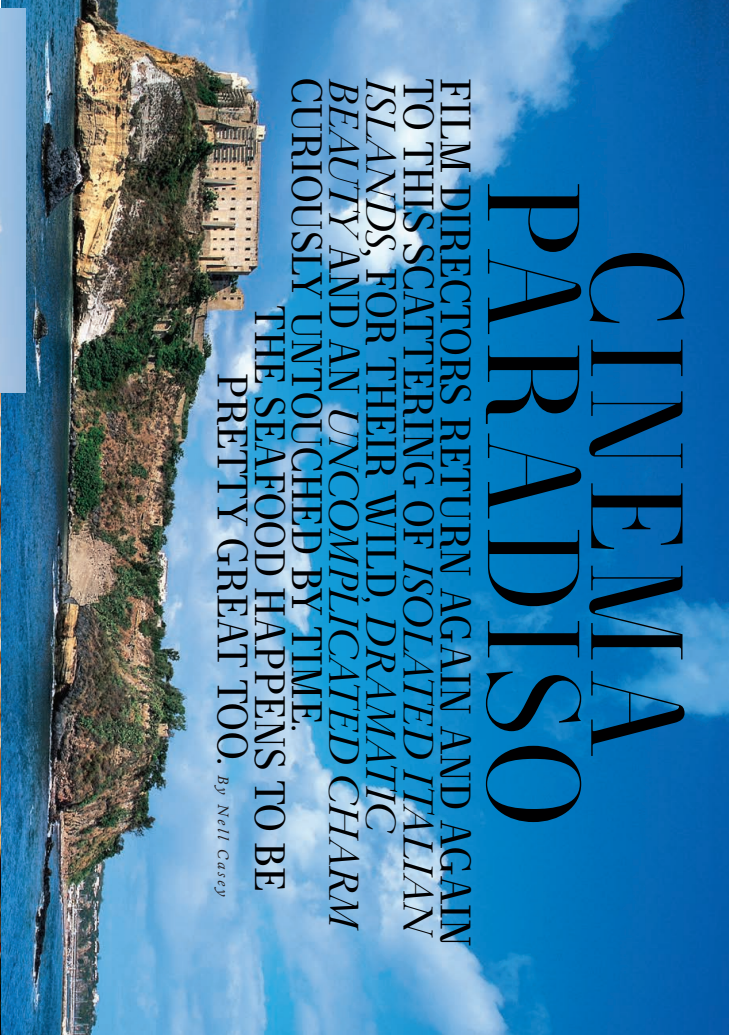


CINEMA PARADISO

FILM DIRECTORS RETURN AGAIN AND AGAIN TO THIS SCATTERING OF ISOLATED ITALIAN ISLANDS, FOR THEIR WILD, DRAMATIC BEAUTY AND AN UNCOMPLICATED CHARM CURIOUSLY UNTOUCHED BY TIME. THE SEAFOOD HAPPENS TO BE PRETTY GREAT TOO. *By Nell Carey*



SCENE STEALERS
The island of Procida (above) and the town of Portofino (far left), where parts of *The Bicycle Thief*, starring Mark Damon and Genneth Paltrow, were filmed.



FROM TOP: DEAM; BORCHI/DE AGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES; SUSAN WRIGHT; PARAMOUNT PICTURES/PHOTOFEST

Procida



LOVE LIFE
The cast (including Monica Vitti, far right) of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *L'Avventura*, on the tiny Isle of Liscia Bianca, off the coast of Panarea.

Panarea

FROM TOP: © DILTZ/RDA/EVERETT COLLECTION; MATTHEW HRANEK/ART + COMMERCE; OBERTO GILI



ISLAND TIME
Panarea's Casa Visconti and Hotel Bays (above).

SPRING/SUMMER 2014

LEGENDARY ESCAPES

Michelangelo Antonioni's 1960 film *L'Avventura* begins with seven friends—a wealthy group of gorgeous, disaffected youth—boating on the Tyrrhenian Sea. Their affluence is visible in their languor; their restlessness expressed in their volatility. At one point they anchor off Liscia Bianca, a tiny islet that emerges like a monolith from the sea. When they discover that one of their party, a young woman, has seemingly vanished into thin air, they scramble up and down the jagged cliffs, playing out small personal dramas as they seek to resolve the larger one. The water crashes against the rocks; the sky opens to possibility. The landscape itself becomes another character—stunning, feisty, mysterious.

This has always been the draw of the islands favored by Italians: extravagant nature with a profound feeling of isolation. There is hustle enough on the mainland, where extravagance of a different sort plays out against the backdrop of crowded cobblestone streets, grandiose exchanges, and an infuriating bureaucracy. When it comes time to leave it all behind, Italians want to feel transported. "That's what we do, especially the rich," a Roman friend told me. "They don't want to go to the beach with others. They want to escape civilization. So they go to these impossible-to-reach places and then they build a palace."

I ventured to the Aeolian paradises—seven UNESCO-protected isles scattered off the northeast coast of Sicily—where Antonioni captured the bewilderment of anxiety of privilege. These are some of the most secluded islands in the world, requiring arduous plane-car-ferry journeys from almost anywhere in Italy. Unless, that is, you are traveling on a private boat. But even then, capricious weather threatens—Aeolus, for whom the islands are named, is the Greek god of wind. "If the islands say no, you don't go," Beatrice Bulgari, a filmmaker and member of the luxury goods family, told me. These magnificent islands are prized all the more, then, for the difficulty of actually reaching them.

Bulgari, who owns a house on Stromboli, the only Aeolian with an active volcano, travels regularly among all the islands. "I am lucky enough to have seen a lot of beautiful places in the world, but there is something very special about feeling like nothing in the middle of nowhere," she said. Bulgari recently shot a movie, *The Look*, on Liscia Bianca, partially in homage to Antonioni. "I remember when I arrived for the first time, at 25 years old, and thought, What do people do here? But this nothing, you come to understand, is everything. You never experience it elsewhere."

SALINA

I got a sense of what Bulgari was talking about after I arrived on Salina. It is the second-largest of the Aeolian islands, and it used to be called Didyme, the Greek word for twin—a reference to the island's two dominant volcanoes, Monte dei Porri and Monte Fossa delle Felci, which are just under and over 3,000 feet tall, respectively. Whereas Stromboli is defined by its active volcano ("You live with the madman," as Bulgari put it), Salina is the most verdant of the islands, thanks to an unusual combination of freshwater springs and volcanic soil. The impact, visually and physically, is profound. There is bouganvillea—always bouganvillea—draping the simple stone houses, but these welcome bursts of fuchsia are ➔

LEGENDARY ESCAPES

"SALINA IS NOT A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE SHOW OFF. IT'S ABOUT SIMPLICITY WITHOUT ANY STATUS SYMBOLS, JUST GOING DEEP INTO LIFE."

just the beginning. Strolling the main road to Santa Maria, one of the villages on Salina, I came across poppies, yellow gorse bushes, wild rosemary, prickly pear cactus, and caper bushes. (Here, the caper, grown to full maturity, is called a *caconico* and is closer to a green olive with a stalk.) There is also a salt lake, which, in an ecological collaboration characteristic of the island, was once mined for salt. (*Salina* means salt mill in Italian.)

"It is a cherished agricultural island," said Alberto Tascia, CEO of Tascia d'Amertea, a top Sicilian family winemaker. He should know: Tascia grew up vacationing on Panarea, another Aeolian island, and when he and his family were on the boat home they always glimpsed an abundant vineyard on Salina. In 2001 they bought it, and in 2003 they opened the Capofaro Malvasia & Resort, an elegant hotel on the vineyard, from which Salina's own Malvasia sweet wine is produced.

Shaped by volcanic activity thousands of years ago, Salina has dramatic cliffs that rise from the cobalt sea, forming numerous rocky swimming coves. The most famous beach is in Polara, on the island's west side, where everyone directs you to see the sunset. "It is best there because it is more orange," my taxi driver explained as he rushed to get me to it on time. Scenes from the 1994 movie *Il Postino* about Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's fictional friendship with his literary postman, were shot here. The beach has been so heavily visited since then, it is now partly blocked off, but it is possible to reach a peaceful cove and, yes, an excellent sunset view.

Following a seemingly bleak trip, I visited the *cinquero* in Santa Maria. It is a startlingly moving place, with tiny black-and-white portraits on the graves. Behind it is a small pebble beach—adored by locals and still enough of a secret not to have an official name—with tiny fish darting through crystalline waters.

Much attention has been brought to the Aeolian islands by various fashion and art stars who own houses there—Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, Cindy Sherman (Stromboli), Maurizio Cattelan, the bad boy of the Italian art scene (Filicudi), the prominent art dealer Gerard Fagionato (Panarea)—but Salina has always stayed out of the spotlight. "It is not a place where people show off," Tascia said. "You might see the stars here, but they are quiet. Salina is about simplicity without any status symbols, just going deep into life."

Alessandro Grassi, a publicist based in Milan, argued that all the islands are being remade in this image. "Yes, Madonna went sailing there," he said, "but there is also a new generation that cares about the future. They are thinking about these islands as an ecosystem for wine and food." To that end a powerful group led by British financier and philanthropist Ben Goldsmith formed the Aeolian Islands Preservation Fund last year; the U.K.-based nonprofit supports sustainable environmental initiatives on the islands.

On my last day, starting at the 17th-century church Santuario della Madonna del Terrizio, I hiked the trail up Monte Fossa—the highest peak in the islands—and picked a bouquet of wildflowers among the eucalyptus and pine trees. Near the top I turned to see the green slope of Monte del Fori and the tiny islands of Filicudi and Alicudi punctuating the sea below. I'd been there for a few

days, but I felt the restoration of a month. I too hoped that Salina, both lavish and humble, would stay this way forever.

Where to stay: **Capofaro Malvasia & Resort**, with its new chef, Ludovico de Vivo. His caper ice cream sandwich is not to be missed (from \$18; capofaro.it). **Hotel Sigurnum** has a wonderful spa (from \$19; hotelsigurnum.it). **Where to eat:** **Da Alfredo** (01-39-90-984-3075), for granita and a pane cunzato (a Sicilian sandwich) on the waterfront.

PANAREA

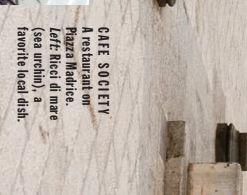
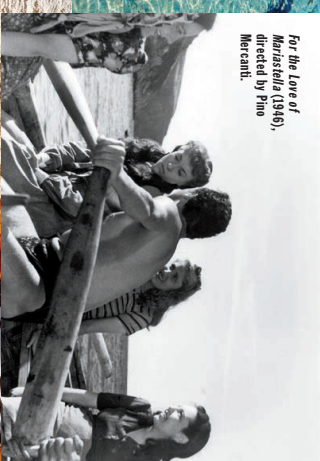
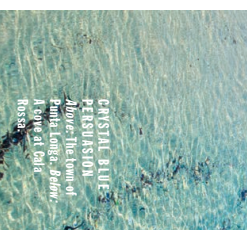
From a distance Panarea is a breathtaking bit of boulder only slightly larger than one square mile, with dramatic strations that resemble elephant skin. It is often described as the "Capri of the Aeolian islands," a wealthy retreat with a chic summer scene. Kate Moss and Uma Thurman have lounged on the terrace of the famed Hotel Raya, a stylish place that opened in the 1960s complete with a seaside disco that instantly put Panarea on every international jetsetter's map. "In July and August it's like a camp for beautiful young people," said Bulgari, whose own 17-year-old daughter has spent many a night dancing at the Raya. But regulars take pains to renounce its party reputation, usually by invoking its past. "When I started going, there was no electricity and no running water," said Antonio Monfreda, an Italian creative director who has been visiting the island since his parents bought a house there in the 1970s. "Star watching and volcano watching—there is a terrific view of Stromboli smoking a few miles away—were the great activities."

These days Panarea appeals to the fans in people—two faces looking in opposite directions—in that you can be seen and you can hide. "It is Capri as I imagine it in the last century," Monfreda added. "When the sun goes to sleep behind you and shines on the rocks, they change from intense yellow to green to violet. And the tiny stone beaches are enchanting."

The most magnificent of these is Cala Junco, in the southernmost part of the island. High cliffs of basalt tower over water that shifts between turquoise and green. Here, the lure of revelry and fame fades away, and you are returned to a primitive solitude.

Though some despair that the Hotel Raya brought nontop rollicking nightlife to the island, the owners, Myriam Beltrami and Paolo Titcher, brought a sophisticated aesthetic, too. The hotel is a sprawling event, rambling up a hill from the port on the east side of the island; the architecture is Greek-influenced, and the impeccable interior design has an Indonesian inflection. (Beltrami spends part of the year in Bali.) There is a similar Grecian style to Panarea in general. The houses are whitewashed, with the occasional pop of a blue shutter or a green door. The labyrinthine streets winding through the center are without cars or lamps. The days of no electricity may be over, but the preferred method of lighting at night is a Moroccan lantern—or, better yet, a full moon.

Where to stay: **Hotel Raya** is a must, if you want to experience the island in full. The jacuzzi, which uses



Favignana

Maddalena



COAST TO COAST
Above: The secluded spots on the island of La Maddalena. Below: The town of Favignana



LEGENDARY ESCAPES

→ water from natural hot springs, is rumored to cure ailments ranging from arthritis to insomnia (FROM SIBO, ANTONIARU). **Where to eat:** *Bridge Sushi* is where the elite meet before heading to the Raxa to dance. It opens for the season in early June (BRODERMARE.COM).

FAVIGNANA

Each of the Aeolians inspires a fierce loyalty, but Favignana, the largest of the Egadi islands—a small archipelago off the west coast of Sicily—elicits perhaps the most intense passion among its enraptured inhabitants. The allure of “my Favignana,” as it was tattooed on the chest of my boat driver, is undeniably casual and offbeat. There are no luxury hotels here; Italians leave their precious cars behind in favor of biking. And the living is *slow*. The crudo tastes so fresh it’s as if the waiter had simply dipped a plate into the sea; the rocky path to the crescent beach of Cala Azzurra winds past a field of donkeys; and the local museum has no guides—but you’ll find your way around just fine.

Ginevra La Caverna, who grew up living part-time in Favignana and now owns Dimora dell’Olivastro, an exquisite B&B on the island, told me that tourists have been coming for less than 10 years. “But there are more coming. From around Italy, of course, but also from Northern Europe, England, and France, even some Americans.” Indeed, in the small main village, where the east and west sides of Favignana meet in a slender middle—the island is shaped like a butterfly—a stylish mix of people gather nightly slapping into the pier; Minuccia Prada and her husband Patrizio Bertelli have reportedly bought a seaside villa.

All of them are attracted by the island’s intense beauty. “Favignana is *wild*,” my Italian friends say. Part of that wildness comes from its brutal history: On the western side of the island, on a hill called Monte Santa Caterina, sits the Castello di Santa Caterina, originally built as a watchtower for pirates. The island, in fact, spent centuries under attack—by Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, and Normans. Favignana’s most beautiful spot, Cala Rossa (which roughly means “red cove”), got its name from the blood of the dead Phoenicians who washed ashore during the Punic Wars.

And then there’s La Matanza, the annual slaughter of bluefin tuna that took place for centuries. Until about a decade ago unsuspecting tuna would pass through these waters on their way to the Atlantic. A team of men would wrestle the giant fish, which weighed as much as 1,000 pounds, from the sea and repeatedly plunge their harpoons into their flesh. Finally, after a run on bluefin tuna—one fetched more than a million dollars on the Tokyo market in 2013—there weren’t enough left to continue the event. But La Matanza lives on in memory, depicted in the stained glass window of the church and in a dignified museum near the port.

Some have heralded Favignana as the next Italian hot spot, but it’s unlikely the island will budge for the whims of luxury. The locals understand that the attraction,

even for the very rich, is nature and simplicity: the pastures with cows and sheep, the groves of olive and sweet fig trees, the rocky beaches, the grottos that dot the perimeter of the island. When I dove into the water near Cala Rotonda, an exquisite beach on the west side, I found myself swimming into a cave where an opening had formed in the rock ceiling and the sun shone through in a single pillar of light. It was as striking as the beam that pierces the Pantheon, but, like so much of Favignana, it had occurred by the happenstance of nature.

Where to stay: *I Pretti*, near the center, has a lovely inner courtyard (FROM SIBO, BRODERMARE.COM). In addition to the elegant B&B *Dimora dell’Olivastro* (FROM SIBO, BRODERMARE.COM), Ginevra La Caverna plans to open another hotel this year. *Dimora Cala del Pozzo*, a restored seaside farmhouse (BRODERMARE.COM). **Where to eat:** *Ogello che C’e C’e* is short on atmosphere but long on crudo—the best meat to be had on the island (01-3838-69-319). The wine bar and restaurant *Canarillo Brillo* (BRODERMARE.COM) is the choice of hip Europeans. **Side trip:** Either of the other two Egadi islands is worth a visit. Marettimo offers a glimpse of life without any pretensions. Levanzo is known for the Grotta del Genovese, home to Stone Age cave paintings. Daily trips are available from mid June to mid September.

MADDALENA ARCHIPELAGO

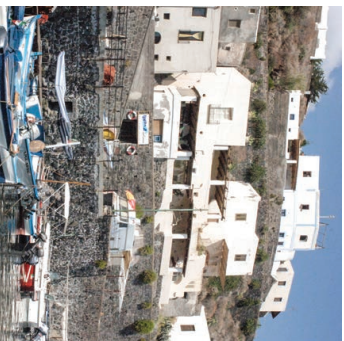
Much attention has been paid to the Costa Smeralda (or Inner-aud Coast), the 35-mile stretch of shoreline on the northeastern tip of Sardinia, Italy’s second-largest island (after Sicily). The Aga Khan created this opulent getaway when he and his consortium bought more than 12,000 acres of coastal property and developed it in the early 1960s. Soon luxury resorts, golf courses, and former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi’s and his notorious “bunga bunga” parties followed. Many Italians feel this area is now overrun—congested with expensive boutiques and the yachts of Russian oligarchs—and have taken to the more secluded Maddalena archipelago, seven islands and many tiny *solinas* found in the Strait of Bonifacio, between Sardinia and Corsica.

The largest is La Maddalena, just a mile off the northeastern shore of Sardinia; for 36 years, until 2008, there was a U.S. naval base here, and a NATO base on nearby Santo Stefano. This provided the island with such a strong economy—because the bases hired locals and imported Americans to do business with them—that courting tourism was unnecessary. That’s changing, thanks to the closing of the base, as well as the

defection of those fed up with the Inner-aud Coast. The town of La Maddalena is still catching up to this new surge of visitors, the pastel buildings and central village are sweet and provincial. But never mind: What mattered—what everyone advised—was that I get out to sea. After all, the archipelago shares the same gorgeously clear water and sculptural granite coastlines that first drew the Aga Khan to the Inner-aud Coast. The only difference is that this area is still unspoiled.

All I needed was a *gommeau*, literally that means a rubber dinghy, but in reality there are all manner of boats to be →

Salina



NET PROFITS

From above: Fishing boats docked in Santa Maria; Monte Fossa della Felicità; Salina’s two dormant volcanoes; steps, carved into the rocky coastline, lead down to the sea at Polina.



Massimo Troisi (*right*) in Michael Radford’s 1994 film *Il Postino*.

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LEGENDARY ESCAPES

➔ rented in the main port of La Maddalena. (Be sure to book a private tour; not a group outing, as it's best to chart your own course. Elena Tours was very good: elenaonlinevacation.com.) Out on the water, I discovered a different world. "You can dive into a sea that has nothing to envy the Caribbean," one friend described it, rather poetically.

The other six islands, in descending size order, are Caprera, Spargi, Santo Stefano, Santa Maria (where Oscar-winning filmmaker Roberto Benigni owns a summer house), Budelli, and Raz-zoli. You can easily visit them all by boat—nothing is more than 20 minutes away, though the ride, while always exhilarating, can sometimes be choppy. "North of Sardinia has come here since childhood and fast-changing winds," a friend who has come here since childhood told me. "It is never boring sailing here."

Caprera was once largely owned by Giuseppe Garibaldi, one of modern Italy's founding fathers; his home is now a museum. The island also features Cala Cottoia, a beach that has drawn comparisons to Tahiti for so long that it has been labeled as such on local maps. (It is set on two secluded coves and is reached only by a strenuous hike.) The delicate pink rock that surrounds the turquoise water has been shaped by the wind into recognizable forms: a cow, a witch's nose, a reclining woman. Budelli, which was the setting for another Antonioni movie, 1964's *Il Deserto Rosso*, includes Spargia Rosa (named for its unique pink sand). It is now off limits to visitors, but you can still glimpse its bluish from a boat.

On uninhabited Spargi, there are even more remarkable stretches of beach. Cala Soraya and Granara among them. The scene was busier here, with boats all around—yachts, *gommone*, sailboats—creating a seaside camaraderie as people plunged into the water, swimming around the pink-gray rock formations and making their way to the silky beaches.

At the end of the day, as we headed back to La Maddalena, we came to Porto Massino, near the northern tip of the island. It was unexpectedly empty—just the water, the white beach, and me. I dove in and felt a lightness I have experienced only here; the salt-water gives a stronger sense of buoyancy. I drifted, looking up at the broad sky enveloped by rock and sea, and I felt I had arrived at the edge of the world. Or, rather, that I had arrived at the nothing that means everything.

Where to stay: La Maddalena is underwhelming when it comes to hotels, but **Grand Hotel Ma & Ma Resort** offers contemporary luxury accommodations, along with a spa and gift-terring lounge bar. (from \$216, grandhotelma.com) **Where to eat:** **La Scogliera**, overlooking the water in secluded Porto Massino, is a must—and so are reservations (01-39-89-89-659). The charming **La Locanda del Mirro**, in the mountains, opens on all sides to stunning views (01-39-78-735-656). &

Getting there: The perfect times to go to avoid the crowds are late May to early June or the month of September. Boats to Siliu and Pan-are leave regularly from the Sardinian port of Milazzo and starting in June there will be hydrofoils (swim) from Naples and Palermo. **Air Panarea** (airpanarea.com) offers helicopter service from the Palermo and Naples airports. For ferries, boats depart from the port of Trapani. (**Absolute Sicilia** is a terrific company specializing in luxury travel within Sicily; ask for Alessandra Buzzi; assolutisicilia.com). Several ferry companies regularly travel to La Maddalena from the Sardinian port of Palermo; it takes just 15 minutes.

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Illustration by Justin Giunta

3 MORE ISLAND TREASURES

PANTILERIA

In 1985, Rome-born fashion photographer Fabrizio Ferri was looking for a new place to shoot. He wanted the "special light" that seems to exist only in Italy. Someone suggested Pantileria, a 32-square-mile island between the coasts of Tunisia and Sicily. "So I jumped on the plane and left three days later with a key to my *dormire*," says Ferri, who later transformed that *dormire*—Pantileria's typical stone house—into a resort. **Motonecero** (motonecero.com).



Those who come to the island, he says, are in search of a place to hide (read: celebri-tes) or a place to recoup their strength amid the olive trees and lava stone. Pantileria is a real-life paradise. There are no beaches on this quiet island, where often the only sound you hear is the whispering wind (hence the island's name, which means "daughter of the wind"). You will find a volcano at the high point of the island sur- rounded by hot springs and fumaroles. "It's not active, but it still breathes," Ferri says of Favara Grande. "It's a very magical place. There are cracks in the earth where steam comes out 24 hours a day." Closer to Africa than to the Italian main- land, Pantileria is too far for many Italians, so it remains an ethereal secret even during the summer. "It's foreign to any- thing we know," Ferri says, "but it's the most amazing place."

another surrounded by granite cliffs (Cotroneo). Perhaps best known as the site of Napoleon's first exile, in 1814, Elba is one of a string of islands between the Ligurian and Tyrrhenian seas. Italian painter Roberto di Girolamo, who owns a house on the island, prefers a relatively remote beach called Palombina. "It's charming. It can be reached only by boat or by walking up and down a staircase of 100 steps," she says. There are always only a few people there. Ringed by this variety of beaches, Elba's interior is made up of greenery-covered mountains—such as the 3,343-foot Monte Capricci, the tip of which can be reached by cable car and which offers a 360-degree view of the archipel-ago. Elba is easy to reach, so it's mobbed from mid-June to early September. But there is one place "that is very hidden, where you can go by boat," says Beatrice Bulgari, an admirer of the place. "Restorante Calanora is really special. You can have the most beautiful fish in the world and sit out the sun. Very simple, but very sophisticated."

PROCIDA

This petite island (less than two square miles) off the coast near Naples served as a backdrop for the 1999 film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and it's hard not to imagine Matt Damon, Jude Law, and Gwyneth Paltrow strolling, sun-basted, down the charming, narrow streets of this fisher- man's village. Gorgeous unpre- tentious and with few tourists, Procida looks like a miniature Positano, its piled-high, pastel- colored houses sprinkled down each side like so many gum- drops. It's less verdant than the more prominent neighboring islands of Capri and Ischia, but Procida's many gorgeous beaches (Chiaia and Cala del Pozzo Vecchio among them), along with the island's authentic life and energetic piazza night- life, are a strong draw. &



Italy's third- largest island (after Sicily and Sardinia), off the Tuscan coast, offers more than 70 beaches—some with silky white sand (Biodola, Scagliati), some with red (Cala Serreghia), one made up of boul- ders (Capo Sant'Andrea), and

FROM TOP: DEAGOSTINI/GETTY IMAGES; MARKA/UG/GETTY IMAGES; DIGITAL LIGHT SOURCE/UG/GETTY IMAGES. OPPOSITE: MAP BY HANISAM HUSSEIN

