



finding the
HEIGHT
of beauty

Vantage point

Capri

Story and Photography by Laura Thayer

The image of Capri summons up sparkling blue sea, bougainvillea-covered villas and a sense of luxury and style that have captivated travelers, writers and artists from around the world for centuries. Since the days when ancient Greek ships sailed past the rocky shores, this island has been treasured for its enchanting and rare natural beauty.



Valerian
flowers on
Monte Solaro

As one of the top tourist destinations in Campania, however, it can sometimes feel like there's little of that historic appeal left to discover. Yet it is there, just beyond the bustling *Piazzetta* and the hum of the Marina Grande harbor.

This escape to Capri visits the island's two highest spots, each one offering a unique vantage point on the island's history. The timeless allure of Capri is still a reality, and just another reason to add it to your Italy travel adventures.

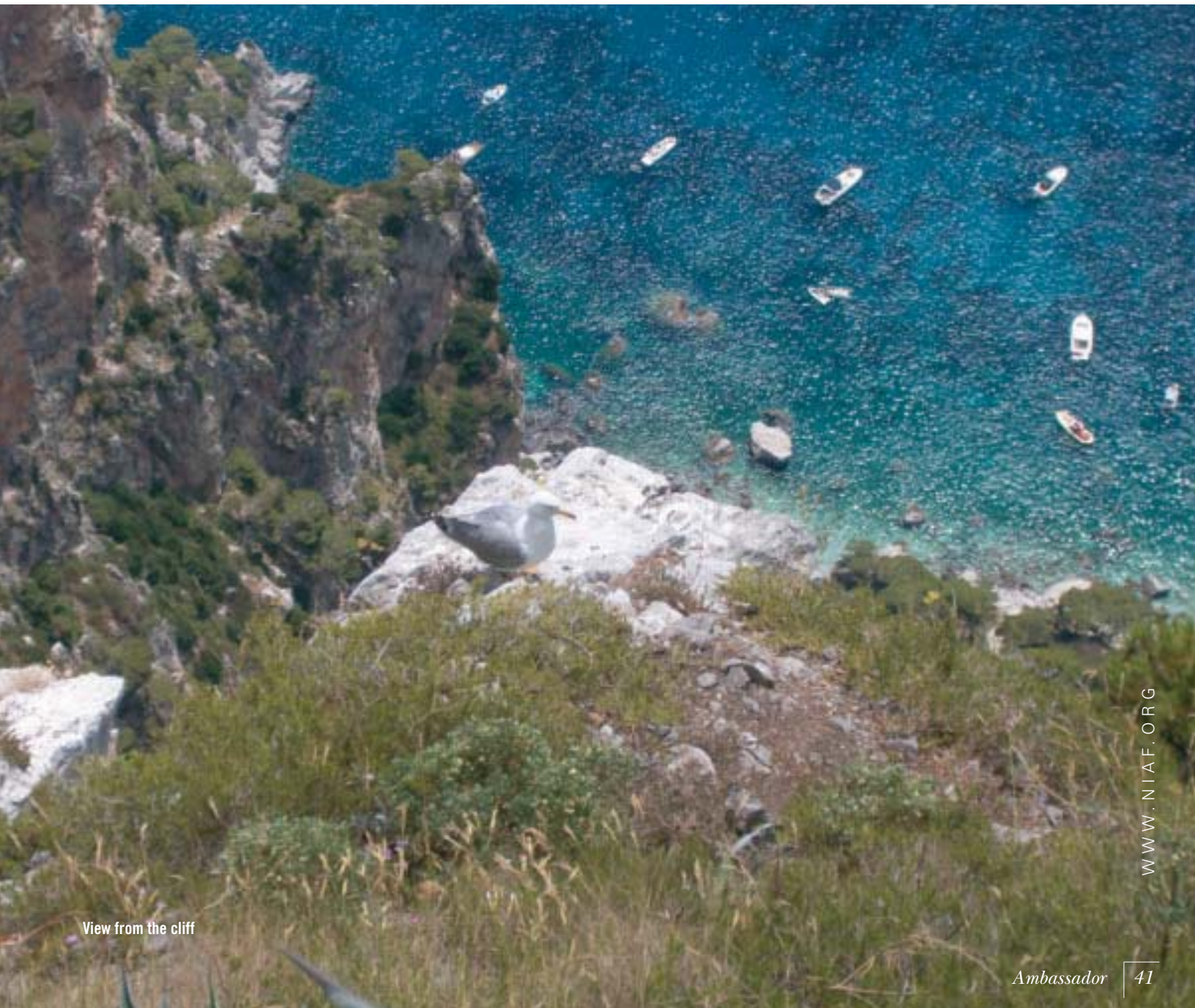
Sitting high atop Monte Tiberio, surrounded by pine trees and overlooking a sheer cliff dropping down

to the sapphire blue sea, Villa Jovis in Capri was once the home of Roman Emperor Tiberius. Named after Jove, the king of the gods, this sprawling villa was completed in 27 A.D. and was the scenic spot where Tiberius ran the Roman Empire for the last 10 years of his life. A fortress, luxurious palace and administrative headquarters all in one, the Villa Jovis was a feat of Roman construction and design.

Built on several levels, an unusual feature for Roman villas of the period, the Villa Jovis featured an ingenious system of water collection and a large cistern to provide fresh water. Capri's scarcity of water made this not

only a luxury but also a necessity for life in one of the most remote spots on the island.

Tiberius once had private rooms overlooking the expansive view of the Bay of Naples with the tip of the Sorrento Peninsula jutting out into the sea nearby. The Villa Jovis ends abruptly with a sheer drop to the sea 1,095 feet below. This dramatic spot is often called "Tiberius's Leap" after the rather gruesome legend telling about how the Emperor would have undesirable guests or servants thrown into the sea. Peer over the edge these days and you'll find a more tranquil view with boats bobbing and swimmers diving ▶



View from the cliff



On the way to Villa Jovis

into the sparkling water. A significant improvement if you ask me.

Today, the ruins still tell the story of once glorious and extravagant days in the style that only a Roman Emperor could sustain. If the island of Capri seems a playground for modern day tourists, it is a humbling experience to stand surrounded by the ruins, with the sound of the wind blowing through the pines and the scent of the warm, salty breeze from the sea. For more than a millennium, humans have come to this beautiful, challenging island to try to tame its rocky coastline and rugged mountains and live amidst its beauty.

Look across Capri from the height of Villa Jovis and an even higher peak rises above the island. This is Monte Solaro, Capri's highest spot, which soars to just over 1,900 feet. To reach the top of Monte Solaro, the journey begins in the village of Anacapri. On the way to Anacapri, tiny buses and taxis zip around roads with what some tour guides call "mamma mia" curves for the way they cause gasps from passengers, vehicles quickly passing by with what seems like only



millimeters to spare and views of the sheer drops down to the sea. Some first-time visitors on that epic ride say far more than "mamma mia!"

Once in Anacapri and finding your balance again, meander through the pretty streets to Piazza Vittorio at the center of the village. Look up and you'll spot the chairlifts scaling the side of the mountain up to Monte Solaro. For a modest fee you can reach the top rather effortlessly compared to the hike. Much like a ski lift, but with individual seats, the chairlift begins quickly once you hop on. First, you glide over private homes, holiday villas and gardens, complete with terraces of grape vines and vegetable patches. Soon, the view captures all

attention as the white houses and buildings of Anacapri stretch out with the brilliant blue of the sea beyond. On a clear day, there is a view of Ischia and Naples across the bay.

As the chairlift reaches the peak, the climb is steeper and the sounds of modern life far behind. With just the hum of the chairlift to break the silence, it feels like a return to nature. Monte Solaro could be considered as something of a shrine to the sheer beauty of nature. After hopping off the chairlift and climbing a short flight of stairs, you enter a rocky landscape with a roughly carved path to follow around the top of the mountain. Monte Solaro draws travelers from all over the world who come



Exploring Villa Jovis

to worship this beauty in the modern way—by taking as many photographs as possible. And they should.

High atop Monte Solaro, the natural landscape of Capri spreads out before your eyes. The clear blue of the sea is tantalizing even from so high above and the cliffs are covered with tough Mediterranean plants that can withstand the extreme setting, hot sun and strong winds. The bright yellow blooms of the broom bushes give way to gnarled rosemary branches and prickly cacti. The cries of seagulls cry float on the breeze, calling you back to the present moment like the gusts of wind from the cliffs.

This is a natural beauty so intense that it is hard to process all at once. There's an inherent urge to stay forever, or to do the next best thing and capture it in one way or another to take it home with you and dip into it on grey days. But until a camera or phone can capture the vertiginous and awe-inspiring feeling of standing on Monte Solaro and soaring between land and sea, you'll just have to visit for yourself. Here, that immense natural beauty ➤



Looking toward Marina Grande harbor at the peak of Monte Solaro

View of the Sorrento Peninsula from Villa Jovis

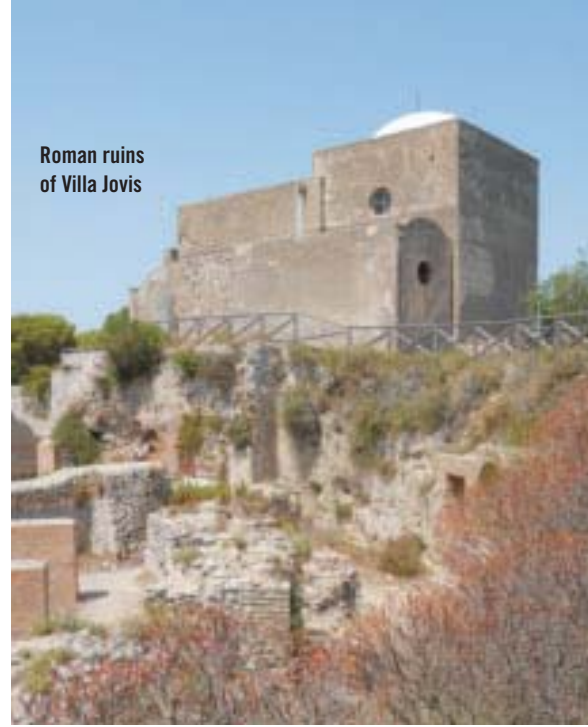


that captivated the ancient Romans is still very much present.

Riding down the chairlift, the passengers descending are often more subdued than those in anxious anticipation of the views on the ride up. There's a hushed and almost reverent feel, and relief that there's time to gradually make a reentry to the hustle and bustle of life below. After the expansive beauty of Monte Solaro and imagining the splendor of Villa Jovis, you will carry with you a deeper understanding of Capri's history and its radiance beauty.

While it would be possible to visit both Monte Solaro and Villa Jovis in one long day on Capri, the pace would be too rushed to dedicate the time and energy each experience deserves while also saving time for the other fascinating spots on the island, like the Blue Grotto, beautiful Augustus Gardens, the Villa Axel Munthe or the shops and gorgeous beaches. There's enough on Capri to keep you coming back for more. After all, that's what we've been doing for centuries. ▲

Roman ruins of Villa Jovis



Laura Thayer is a writer and art historian who has been living, writing and hiking on the Amalfi Coast since 2007. Her work has appeared in Italia! magazine and DK Eyewitness guidebooks. She wrote "The Amalfi Coast: Walking Through History One Step at a Time" in the Fall 2014 issue of Ambassador. Visit her website at ciaoamalfi.com.



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