

CHECK IN

A NEST WITH A VIEW

By JEFF ISRAELY

THE SPLENDID CLIFFSIDE view provides much of Il Pellicano's appeal. So too does its creative, home-grown Tuscan cuisine. But what ultimately makes this hotel in Porto Ercole, Italy, a don't-miss on the Mediterranean luxury tour is something that you can't quite see or taste. It's in the way that the pool staffer hands you a towel without missing a beat, or how the sommelier suggests a wine without jamming it down your palate. The only word



TOP TABLES: The seascape is fine, the dining divine

that can capture this particular brand of indulgence *all'Italiana simpatico*: a mix of kindness, likability and just plain fun.

Some of that fun may be at the guests' expense. After an hourlong mas-

sage during my recent visit, I found it hard to rouse myself from a delightful stupor, but the therapist waited for me with a sly, mocking grin as I returned to reality—one eye at a time. Il Pellicano is luxury that

doesn't take itself too seriously. "You set certain guidelines for the staff, but you also give them the space to interpret their role in a way they're comfortable with," explains Roberto Sciò, who helps run Il Pellicano.

The easygoing tone is set by Sciò's father and namesake, who bought the place on a whim in 1979. Roberto Sr. had been a regular customer since the early days of the hotel, established in 1965 by English pilot Michael Graham who named it after the equally dramatic Pelican Point in California. Sciò remodeled the hotel and put new luster on the elegantly understated gold and cream rooms and suites—virtually all with an outdoor space of their own. The centerpiece, however, is the expanded kitchen and open-air dining space that brought home the fruits with a Michelin star last year. I cashed in with an antipasto of veal and tuna carpaccio followed by roast lamb in a surprisingly subtle sweetbread and goat's cheese sauce. The food and service was such a pleasure that I almost forgot to enjoy the moon hovering over our Mediterranean cliffside perch. It's *simpatico* bordering on the divine. tel: (39-0564) 858 111; www.pellicanohotel.com

TIME TRAVELER

One Night in Athens

You have one evening to spend in the Greek capital. Three people in the know tell you how to do it right.

1. ANTHEE CARASSAVA, TIME correspondent I would start off with a stroll through the meandering streets of the ancient city to the foot of the Acropolis, pictured, to catch a performance at the Herodus Atticus theater. Whatever the show, it's worth soaking up the dramatic ambience. I'd then dine at Varoulko downtown for a platter of baby calamari sautéed in basil sauce and a dessert of fruit soup and cinnamon ice cream. You can burn it off afterward by bopping and bouncing among Athens' chichi socialites at Balthazar in the city center. But if there's a full moon, the Parthenon is the



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place to be. A frenzy of free events and entertainment has crowds clambering until 3 a.m.

2. FOTIS A. KARAYANNOPOULOS, attorney Begin with a martini at the Hilton's panoramic Galaxy Bar, pictured, where you can watch a glorious Greek sunset. Move on to the Panathinaia open-air cinema to catch a vintage 1940s film and smell the jasmine flowers that adorn the cement wall. Then, take to the balcony of the Attikos restaurant for a great view and a scrumptious *sofrito* veal meal. Head for the trendy Gazi clubbing district for a final round of drinks and some late-night flirting and dancing. Should Tyche, goddess of Fortune, hitch you up with a new acquaintance, head up to Kaisariani hill where you can lie under the pine trees in the courtyard of a Byzantine monastery, gazing at the stars.

3. NIKOS DIMOU, author Take the new tram (it's slow but delightful) from the center of Athens to the Phaliron coast. Once there, you have two choices: steer left for the Paralia—a strip of seaside nightclubs and famous *bouzoukia* (clubs with live Greek music). Or veer right, as I would, toward the Peace and Friendship Stadium. From there, walk half a mile to discover

Greece's most picturesque small harbor, Mikrolimano, pictured. Then, visit the Dourambeis restaurant for a dinner of fresh fish and luxurious salads.



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PETER ADAMS—ALAMY (TOP); IML IMAGE GROUP/ALAMY (BELOW LEFT)