



Sea of TREASURES

Marvel at the exquisite, centuries-old craftsmanship of the Mediterranean coral carvers in **RAVELLO**.

Arriving in Ravello, overlooking the Amalfi Coast, you discover a sublime combination of calm and beauty. From its mountain perch among lemon groves, the town offers enchanting coastal panoramas that have inspired painters, authors and musicians, including JMW Turner, DH Lawrence and Richard Wagner. Many visitors are drawn to the town's Romanesque cathedral and the lush tropical gardens of Villa Cimbrone and Villa Rufolo, but can easily miss another Ravello jewel.

Tucked away in the Piazza Duomo is the Camo handicraft company, home to the spectacular coral and cameo creations of Giorgio Filocamo and his staff. With a large fountain in its entrance and display cases with exquisite red, pink and white jewellery, cameos and figurines, Camo is full of wonderful distractions, not least its own coral museum at the rear of the company's shop.

"Coral has always been considered a lucky charm in Italy and the country has been creating masterpieces fashioned from this fascinating material for centuries," says Giorgio. "The corals of the Amalfi Coast have been collected and crafted by artisans here since at least the 14th century and our local red coral is still highly prized for its exceptional quality."

Founded in 1986, the museum houses some 600 cameo and coral treasures from around Italy, collected by Giorgio over more than 50 years. They range from Roman decorated shells to a set of 14 cherub heads from the 19th century, from decorated mother-of-pearl to a Louis XV snuff box. "Two of my favourites are a red coral carving of Christ on a crystal cross from the 17th century and a 16th-century Madonna holding a tiny piece of Christ's cross," Giorgio says. "They are magnificent pieces, especially when you know that carving coral is highly skilled. You can only do it by hand, shaping it first, then making it shine with a pumice stone, and finally adding the fine detail."

Giorgio, who has been honing his skills ever since he was taught as an 11-year-old by his grandmother, continues a centuries-old tradition of Italian craftsmanship. He has produced work for Pope John Paul II and Princess Caroline of Monaco as well as such famous names as Hillary Clinton and Pierce Brosnan. "Coral has a special allure because it's a living material," Giorgio says. "And it's no more special than when it comes from the warm waters of the Mediterranean." ■

Clockwise from above: the coral museum in Ravello includes 19th-century cameos and figurines; the delicate art of carving; and master craftsman Giorgio Filocamo.

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