



ITALY
CastaDiva Resort
Blevio
39/031-32-511
castadivaresort.com
From \$460.

A Little Night Music

I sip a glass of prosecco on my rooftop terrace with a book by my side, but nothing can divert my attention from the sunset view of Lake Como and the mountains beyond. Opera music drifts from my neighbor's suite, which is fitting, given the setting.

I am at the former home of 19th-century opera diva Giuditta Pasta. The mansion, which Pasta called Villa Roda, is the centerpiece of the CastaDiva Resort, the first five-star hotel to open on Lake Como in a century. Pasta lived here in the town of Blevio, about 30 miles north of Milan, from 1830 until her death in 1865. During that time, she collaborated with the composer Vincenzo Bellini, who, according to legend, caught her attention by sailing across the lake from Moltrasio to reach her villa. Pasta also hosted other cultural luminaries of the era, including composer Gioachino Rossini and the French author Stendhal.

When the property was purchased in 2002 by a Como native (now the hotel's co-owner, who wishes to remain anonymous), the villa was a dilapidated wreck that had been vacant for 65 years, its historical significance all but forgotten. The discovery of a personal letter and a pillow monogrammed with Pasta's initials led the owner to realize he had acquired her home. It is now one of nine villas, three historic and six newly built, on the 6.4-acre property.

Pasta's restored villa—its colonnaded façade inspired by Milan's La Scala opera house—has been decorated by designer Erasmo Figini in a bold style that evokes the romance of life in the theater. He commissioned local artisans to replicate 19th-century furniture that he upholstered in rich fabrics in shades of persimmon, olive, and gold. My suite's living room is connected to the bedroom by a long hallway lined

on one side by mirrored, gilded closets and on the other by a wall of sliding glass doors. Gracing the walls are portraits of Pasta, with her almond-shaped eyes, and the debonair, curly-haired Bellini.

I have entered their world, and I can hardly wait to attend a performance at Como's 198-year-old opera house, Teatro Sociale. Before heading off to Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, I dine on squid-ink ravioli stuffed with lobster at the resort's restaurant, L'Orangerie.

CastaDiva's special relationship with the theater offers guests VIP access. When I arrive,

I am ushered backstage to meet the director, Massimo Lambertini. I peek at the set as costumed actors mill about, chatting and laughing, before the performance. During intermission, Barbara Minghetti, the theater's president, invites me to the Pasta Hall, a spacious room decorated with portraits of the soprano and Bellini. Minghetti points out that Pasta probably would have been more famous than Maria Callas had she lived in the age of electronic recordings. "She is our diva, our star of Como," says Minghetti.

As I sit in my private box feeling rather noble, soprano Jessica Pratt hits the high notes of a lilt-

ing aria in act 1 of *La Sonnambula*. Bellini was living in Como when he wrote the 1831 opera for Pasta to show off her incredible range. The work was hailed as his first masterpiece. I close my eyes and try to imagine Pasta's voice, which writer Stendhal described as "beauty, always alive with that unmistakable, burning energy, that extraordinary dynamism that can electrify an entire theater."

After the final curtain falls, I return to CastaDiva and ascend a grand spiral staircase to my suite. The music has faded, but in these surroundings, I remain under its spell. **A**

Opera Hotels *Around the World*



Grand Hotel et de Milan, Italy



Aria Hotel, Czech Republic



Four Seasons Hotel Buenos Aires, Argentina



Hotel Sacher, Austria

ARGENTINA

Four Seasons Hotel
Buenos Aires
54/(11) 4321-1200
fourseasons.com/buenosaires

The concierge at the Four Seasons can arrange tickets and tours of the Teatro Colón opera house, which reopened last spring after a \$100 million renovation. The 103-year-old theater is renowned for its acoustics. From \$495.

AUSTRIA

Hotel Sacher
Vienna
43/(0) 1-51-456-0
sacher.com

Located across from the Vienna State Opera, the Hotel Sacher hosts many operagoers among its guests. You may even spot a performer in the Anna Sacher restaurant before or after the show. From \$410.

CHINA

Ritz-Carlton Beijing Financial Street
Beijing
86/10-6601-6666
ritzcarlton.com

The Ritz-Carlton's Sights and Sounds of Beijing package takes you to a Peking opera performance, where you'll visit the artists' makeup room; to the hotel's apothecary, with its 88 varieties of tea; to Qi restaurant for Peking duck; and finally, to the hotel spa. From \$1,350 for two nights.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Aria Hotel
Prague
420/225-334-111
ariahotel.net

At Aria Hotel, you'll find a floor dedicated to opera, another to classical music, and others to jazz and contemporary. The hotel's music director, Ivana Stehlikova, can advise you on cultural events in the city. The

hotel is located near the State Opera House, the National Theater, and the Rudolfinum, home to the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. From \$257.

ITALY

Grand Hotel et de Milan
Milan
39/027-23-141
grandhoteletdemilan.it

A short stroll from the La Scala opera house, the Grand has a unique place in opera history. Giuseppe Verdi lived—and died—here. Enrico Caruso recorded here. Maria Callas and José Carreras stayed here. The hotel's La Scala Experience package includes a CD and tickets to the theater museum. The concierge can help you get performance tickets. From \$1,260 for two nights.

NEW ZEALAND

Mollies
Auckland
64/9-376-3489
mollies.co.nz

Opera instructor Frances Wilson owns this boutique hotel, where five suites are equipped with baby grand pianos, and guests can enjoy informal concerts by Wilson's students, visiting opera stars, and the cast of the New Zealand Opera. From \$530.

SWITZERLAND

Baur au Lac
Zurich
41/44-220-50-20
www.bauraulac.ch

The landmark Baur au Lac offers a preperformance behind-the-scenes tour of Zurich's opera house that allows visitors to see the costume room and walk on the stage. From \$685, not including opera tickets.