



Clockwise from main image: the 22m *Blue Deer* is the largest catamaran in the Mediterranean available for private hire. The picturesque harbour of Ponza in the Pontine Islands. The town of Gaeta is under-the-radar. The stairs to Gaeta's church of San Francesco

In the Pontine Islands the season has drawn to a close. It is barely October, yet for Italians – and for Romans in particular, who claim this small archipelago in the Tyrrhenian Sea as their playground – beach life is over for another year. For north Europeans, however, this last gasp of summer is perfection: a warm sea, a gentle sun and a mellow autumn light that renders the loveliest of scenes even lovelier.

Not many outside Italy have heard of the Pontines, and fewer still have visited, perhaps because the islands lack the sophistication and glamour of, say, Capri, Ischia or Panarea, and perhaps because all but Ponza (the principal island, pictured top left) and Ventotene (with a population of barely more than 700) are uninhabited. While ferries provide a link to the mainland at either Anzio or Formia (midway between Rome and Naples) and there's a smattering of small hotels and guesthouses on offer for landlubbers, essentially this is boating territory.

In the picturesque harbour town of Gaeta (pictured top centre and right) – another Italian gem that appears to have passed most tourists by – I board *Blue Deer* (pictured left), a 22m catamaran, at the tail end of its second season in operation. Officially, *Blue Deer* has the suffix *San Lorenzo Sea Lodge*, which is a bit of a mouthful to use on a regular basis but helps to explain her existence. She is the second creation of husband-and-wife team Stefano and Giorgia Barbini, who relinquished careers in the fashion industry (both had worked – and met – at Escada, and Giorgia's family were the founders and longtime owners of Brioni before its sale to PPR, now Kering) to turn their south Tyrolean holiday home into an exclusive-use property, White Deer San Lorenzo Mountain Lodge, which opened back in 2010 and has since garnered a reputation as the

MED IN HEAVEN

Two new boats for charter in the Mediterranean mirror the pioneering spirits – and impeccable taste – of their respective hotelier owners. **Pamela Goodman** gets a first look at *Satori* and explores the Pontine Islands aboard *Blue Deer*

ultimate chalet in the Dolomites. "Chalet," however, feels almost too pedestrian a term to describe White Deer, just as "charter boat" fails completely to capture the spirit and style of *Blue Deer*.

Facts and figures are all very appealing: *Blue Deer* is the largest catamaran in the Mediterranean for private hire; she has two double and two twin cabins, with the option of turning two into triples; she is wide and stable and extraordinarily spacious; and chic in a way that one would expect from two fashionistas. But the true essence of a trip onboard is the Italian-ness of the experience. Despite taking *Blue Deer* to the Caribbean in the winter and a brief flirtation with the idea of taking her beyond Italian waters in the summer, the Barbinis have reined firmly back on this, attesting to the fact that, in Stefano's words, there is nowhere more beautiful than the islands and coast of the south Tyrrhenian Sea. The suggestion of the Adriatic coast off Puglia as an alternative destination is met with an instant but charmingly good-natured dismissal.

If the landscape is exclusively Italian, so too is the food and wine. The Barbinis are passionate foodies and Giorgia herself is one of the chefs at the lodge. On *Blue Deer*, Paolo from Puglia is at the culinary helm, buying only the best ingredients – aged Parmesan from Zibello, Sant'Ilario Parma ham from Langhirano, olive oil from Puglia, balsamic vinegar from La Secchia – as staples

over Italy who have no presence on the international stage. So it's no surprise to find the galley – in reality more of an open-plan kitchen – in *Blue Deer*'s main, deck-level saloon (pictured above), where guests can prop themselves up on the bar and watch and learn as Paolo conjures his magic. The concept is a clever one – emulated, I discover, on *Satori* (pictured overleaf), an exquisite sailing yacht launched earlier this year, which has much in common with *Blue Deer*.

Satori's owners, Claus and Jeanette Thottrup, are Danish by birth but Italian in heart and mind. Like the Barbinis they had a hospitality epiphany some years back, turning a rundown Tuscan estate – located 90 minutes south of Florence and which they had originally bought as a family home – into a small hotel. From humble beginnings with a mere



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for the season, supplemented by the finest local produce bought solely in accordance with the boat's location. If *Blue Deer* is in Sicily, for example, you will never be served mozzarella di bufala, which comes, of course, from Campania. And Stefano personally selects the wine, much of it sourced from tiny producers all

eight bedrooms, Borgo Santo Pietro now has 20, some within the achingly pretty 13th-century villa, others set among extensive grounds encompassing orchards, knot gardens, rose gardens, cut-flower gardens, a lake and a farm – the latter producing enough fruit, vegetables,

meat, eggs, cheese, honey and olive oil to make the hotel (and now the boat) almost self-sufficient. An all-consuming project you might think, but Claus, with happy memories of childhood family holidays in Denmark aboard his parents' small yacht, had long harboured a dream to build his own. *Satori*, a whopping 40m traditional wooden sailing yacht, is the manifestation of that dream.

When I first lay eyes on her, she is moored in the pretty Mallorcan harbour of Port d'Andratx, having just sailed through choppy seas on her return from an inaugural outing to the Barcelona boat show. Though

From top: *Blue Deer*'s main, deck-level saloon. The food served onboard varies according to the yacht's location. Ponza is the largest of the Pontine Islands, most of which are uninhabited





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still, at the time, awaiting a final flourish of interior trimmings, she is as shiny as a pin – quite literally – her heavily laminated mahogany contours reflecting everything around her, not least a gaggle of sailors and boat owners who have gathered on the quayside in wide-eyed admiration.

And admire her they should, for the tale of her creation is a painstaking one involving years of frustration that resulted in the Thottrups eventually setting up their own shipyard in Bodrum, a city

renowned for its boat-building prowess, to guarantee that the yacht would meet their exacting standards. The plan now, of course, is to offer other likeminded dreamers the chance to build a boat like his, with all the expertise of Bodrum's craftsmen.

Satori is no ordinary yacht. While on the one hand she exudes a bygone, teak-and-mahogany elegance, on the other she is up-to-the-minute fresh. There's no doubting Claus's nostalgia for the understated grace of 1920s-era sailing and for the honesty and integrity of traditional

building methods, but he's a 21st-century man, too, who believes firmly in state-of-the-art living. On *Satori*, most services, including the raising and lowering of the sails, operate at the touch of a button, and there are iPads in each of the five double cabins – think walnut panelling, marble bathrooms and reams of stone coloured linen – controlling complex light, heat, music and air-conditioning systems. And then there are the flatscreens for streaming Apple TV and telephones for room service.

And, as with *Blue Deer*, the galley has been elevated from the bowels of the boat to a prime position on deck because, like the Barbinis, the Thottrups see food as



From top: the 40m *Satori* is no ordinary yacht. The vessel combines 1920s sailing aesthetics with state-of-the-art technology

integral to the boating experience they offer. The most significant difference perhaps is that *Satori* comes with Michelin-starred provenance in the form of Andrea Mattei and Antonello Sardi who, respectively, run Meo Modo at Borgo Santo Pietro, and the Thottrups' Florentine restaurant La Bottega del Buon Caffè. The two have trained *Satori's* resident chef and whenever possible join the boat to cook for guests. Certainly, while I'm on board, Antonello's food is exceptional, paired with a multitude of wines that appear from an extravagant, temperature-regulated cellar masterfully concealed below the stairwell.

He's a details man, there's no doubt about it, yet Claus has a disarming sense of simplicity too. As we set off under sail, north then northeast along Mallorca's mountainous coastline to Port de Soller, he clearly relishes life on the ocean waves. *Satori*, of course, is designed to withstand the wildest, toughest elements, and what the Mediterranean throws at us that day is mercifully tame, but the thrill of the wind in her sails is undeniable. This, ultimately, is what Claus hopes his guests will take away with them – a sense of the raw power of nature combined with luxury at the highest level.

Claus's enthusiasm for *Satori* is matched entirely by that of Stefano for *Blue Deer*. Back in the Pontine Islands, after a night in picturesque Ponza harbour and a guided tour of the island's famous Roman cisterns, we leave for Palmarola (pictured right),



From top: *Satori's* walnut-panelled master suite with marble ensuite bathroom. The island of Palmarola is a favourite with *Blue Deer* owner Stefano Barbini

Stefano's self-confessed favourite island in the whole of the country. It's a cloudless day, temperatures are nudging 26°C and the sea is *liscio come l'olio* – smooth as oil. *Blue Deer* is just one of two boats in the bay, where the uninhabited hulk of Palmarola with its mighty cliffs of white pumice, soars skywards from water of impossible blue. "Mamma mia," says Stefano, as he scrubs clean a bucket of freshly caught sea urchins in preparation for dinner, "this is my paradise." ♦

TWAIN SAILING

Blue Deer (sanlorenzolodges.com) is available for private charter in Italy in May-November for a minimum of one week in high season, five nights in shoulder season and three nights in low season, from €30,000 a week. It sleeps eight (with an option for 10) and has a crew of four. **Satori** (satoriyacht.com) is available for private charter throughout the Mediterranean with a flexible itinerary, from €99,000 a week. The yacht sleeps 10 and has a crew of eight.



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