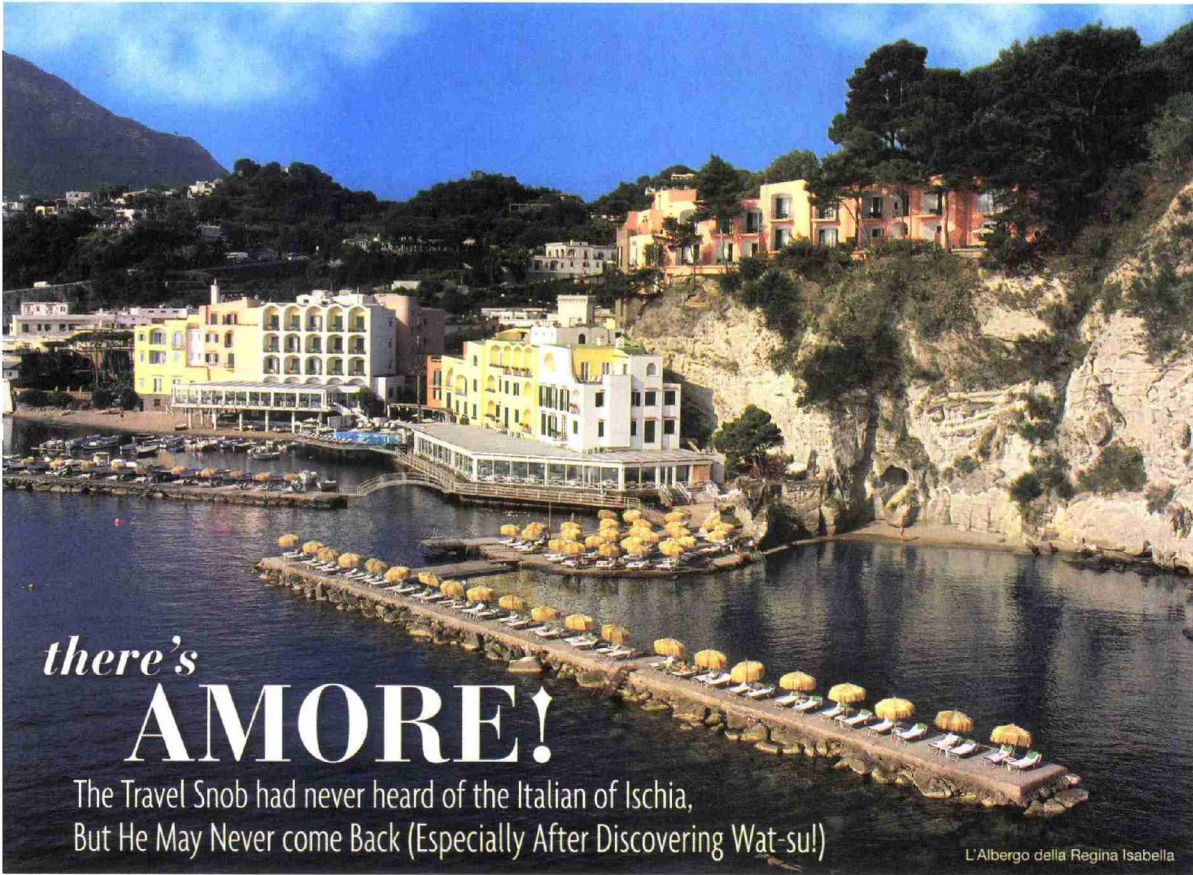


**TRAVEL SNOB**



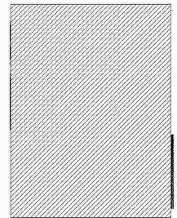
**W**e've already decided there are two parts to heaven. From September-April it's the Hotel Plaza Athénée, the glitzy, sexy, ultra Parisian hotel where Carrie and Big reunited on "Sex & the City." And from April-September it's in the south of France in Antibes, where at the end of the island sits The Hotel du Cap Eden Roc, one of the most legendary get-aways for the rich and famous where photographer Slim Aarons would take photos of "Beautiful people in beautiful places."

So, admittedly, heaven is a bit crowded. Not like I'd know. I still have a condo reserved for me in The Lake of Fire below, where at least I'll know people.

So if heaven is indeed full, and hell is filled with my friends and glow sticks, where to fit L'Albergo della Regina Isabella, a five star property off the coast of Naples, Italy on an island called Ischia? Truth be told, I'd never heard of it before until reading it's the area where "The Talented Mr. Ripley" was filmed, a movie with some of the best cinematography and locations in recent memory. Surely, I'd have to check this out. And did I ever.

First things first, the hotel is old school with a twist. Everything is modern and up to date, but in that Italian "if it

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doesn't work we'll get to it later" panache. It's built into a cliff, and keeps expanding. Finding your bearings will take awhile, but the glamour of being on an island in Italy with views of Capri (and David Geffen's yacht, apparently) outside your window more than make up for the being momentarily lost. Outside the hotel is a stretch of rock and sand that form a jetty, where you can lay and sun to your heart (or skin's) content.

I enjoyed every part of my time in this hidden jewel, but my absolute favorite part was its "watsu" treatment. It sounds more like something you'd order at an Asian fusion restaurant, but it's a type of body therapy practiced in the finest European spas and clinics, and leaves you floating — literally and figuratively.

I like to think of myself as a spa connoisseur, but even I was surprised—delightfully so!—by the uniqueness of this treatment, which combines elements of shiatsu, massage, muscle stretching and dance in a pool. Hence the name: water shiatsu, or watsu for short. I've had plenty of shiatsu treatments—the Japanese technique uses finger pressure when kneading, pressing, tapping and stretching — but never underwater. Even as I stepped in the pool to experience a treatment at the Thermal Bath and Spa hater's spa, I still couldn't quite wrap my mind around it.

The pool was heated to a comfortable degree, which immediately put me at ease. The therapist turned me onto my back and began a series of stretches while I floated seemingly on air, the warm water relaxing my muscles, joints and spine. For an hour the therapist gently supported the weight of my body with her knees while she pushed and pulled, manipulating my back, neck, shoulders and legs, and relieving the tensions that had built up.

There's a rhythmic element to this, too. Moments of stillness are complemented by flowing movements as the therapist gently swings you from one side to the other in a soothing, comforting way, like a well-practiced aquatic dance. I closed my eyes and stayed in the moment, which is near impossible for someone whose thoughts wouldn't stop for a SWAT team.

I later described it as a spiritual experience, but that could have just been the wonderfully weightless sensation of aquatic therapy, something that clearly had been missing in my life. Now I just need to find this therapy without having to reach for my passport. **stb**