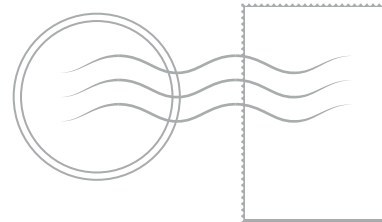


POSTCARD

Pompeii



New and reopened exhibitions are shedding more light on the once ash-covered city near Naples, discovers **Natalie Marsh**

I'm standing in the middle of what, almost 2,000 years ago, was a bustling town square, staring up at Mount Vesuvius and trying to visualise what this vast hub in the old city of Pompeii would have been like on the day the volcano erupted on August 24 in 79AD. While the lava flowed down the other side of the volcano, away from the city, many of its 20,000 inhabitants were killed when the wind blew toxic gas and then ash their way, swiftly asphyxiating and burying them under 21ft of volcanic debris.

Pompeii was accidentally found in the 1700s, incredibly well preserved, and even now it's said that around 25% of the city remains undiscovered. It's without a doubt one of the most awe-inspiring places I've ever been to, and walking the cobbled streets feels haunting.

The buildings are without roofs, which were made of wood, but the detail of this city has not been lost. Having a guide who can point out the nuances is almost essential here – without one I may never have noticed the grooves in the buildings' floors that indicated sliding doors, or understood the importance of the narrow roadside channels that carried water away to prevent flooding.

There are lots of exhibitions across the 163-acre site, among them the House of Lovers, one of the most impressive due to the near-perfect preservation of its second floor, which reopened in 2020 after a 40-year closure. And just this year, a new exhibition, 'Art and Sensuality in the Houses of Pompeii', opened to showcase erotic art that has been found across the city, as well as its significance.

The Antiquarium, a museum of permanent Pompeii exhibits, also reopened last year. Right in the centre of the room are plaster casts of bodies, frozen in time. It felt surreal and slightly intrusive to see how Pompeii inhabitants spent their final moments, shielding themselves and each other from the gas and ash – a sight I will remember for years to come. **TW**



BOOK IT

Classic Collection offers seven nights' B&B at Sorrento's Grand Hotel Aminta from £1,549 per person for departure on May 13, 2023, based on two adults sharing a seaview room. Price includes flights, transfers and a guided tour of Pompeii. classic-collection.co.uk



TOP: Remnants of the courthouse in Pompeii's Forum
ABOVE: The sun sets over the ancient city

PICTURES: Natalie Marsh; Shutterstock/Alican Ozkeskin