

BRIEFS

Lights, Camera, Action . . . Vacation!

ITALY

Paths Both Beaten and Hidden

Rome's tourists are venerated and degraded in "La Grande Bellezza" ("The Great Beauty"), a film by the Italian director Paolo Sorrentino that won this year's Oscar for best foreign film. Whatever its views of visitors, the movie acts as an irresistible invitation to the Eternal City's more subtly beguiling attractions, as its suave protagonist and the audience are coolly guided through hidden courtyards, historic palazzos and less-frequented works of architecture.

It's a journey worth emulating, according to the Rome Cavalieri, a Waldorf-Astoria Hotel offering guests their own guided tour of destinations featured in the film, including the apartments at Palazzo Sacchetti (the palace of the Marquis Sacchetti, normally open to the public only for a hefty price), a luncheon at the home of the Marchioness Violante Guerrieri Gonzaga, and a few inevitable sites, like the Colosseum.

The full-day excursion begins at the Fontana dell'Acqua Paola on Janiculum Hill, followed by a visit to the Tempietto (tomb) at Donato Bramante's San Pietro church in Montorio and a walk across Baccio Pontelli's Ponte Sisto bridge to see Borromini's illusory corridor at the Palazzo Spada in Rome's historic district, where the courtyards of Renaissance palaces will be open. Later, the tour stops for a private lunch and reception on the rooftop terrace of the Marchioness's Palazzo Taverna before heading to the Via Veneto neighborhood and the ancient baths at Caracalla. It finishes with a rarely seen view of the city through the keyhole of a door on Aventine Hill.

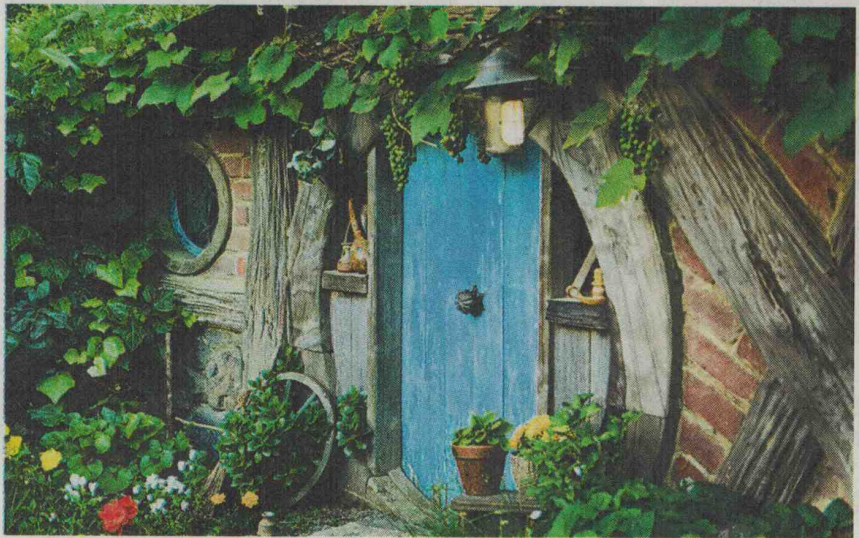
Alexandra Massini, the hotel's resident art historian, is the guide. The tour, as well as lunch and transportation, can be customized but must be booked at least 10 days in advance and at least three weeks ahead if participants plan on lunch at the Palazzo Taverna. Rates start at 1,345 euros, or about \$1,790 at \$1.33 to the euro, for five and vary for smaller groups and individuals. Those rates do not include the hotel, which starts at 290 euros for a room with a twin bed. Reservations: 39-06-3509-2040 or romhi.concierge@waldorfastoria.com.

RACHEL LEE HARRIS

NEW ZEALAND

Bilbo Baggins Slept Here

It's dinner and a movie . . . set. The Hobbiton Movie Set in New Zealand, as seen in the screen adaptations of J. R. R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and "The Hob-



FROM TOP, ROME CAVALIERI; HOBBITON MOVIE SET TOURS

bit," is offering night tours of Bilbo Baggins's homeland.

The new dinner tours (adults, 175 New Zealand dollars, or about \$150 at 1.16 New Zealand dollars to the United States dollar; ages 10 to 14, 140 dollars; ages 5 to 9, 100 dollars; and younger, free) take visitors on a guided stroll through the Shire at dusk, followed by a banquet at the Green Dragon. The latter is recognizable from "The Hobbit" as the place where Bilbo began his journey with the dwarves, and it is celebrated in song by the hobbits Pippin and Merry in "The Return of the King."

All exterior shots of the Shire were filmed here, and the interior of the Green Dragon, which last year was transformed into a fully working pub, seems straight out of Middle

Earth. It's a location that organizers say draws some 240,000 guests a year, though the evening tours are limited to 48 diners.

Dinner is followed by a lantern-lit visit to the set, with welcoming hobbit holes festively illuminated and chimneys smoking, reminiscent of the events of Bilbo's "eleventy-first" birthday, as seen in "The Fellowship of the Ring." Other recognizable Shire set locations include the mill, the bridge and the party tree, where Bilbo made his farewell speech and disappeared using the One Ring. The tours, which last four hours, include a banquet dinner, a drink from the Green Dragon's Southfarthing line of craft ales and transportation. They are offered every Wednesday. Reservations: hobbitontours.com. ASHLEY WINCHESTER