

# The new days of Pompeii

BY PETER POPHAM

POMPEII ♦ It is perhaps the most remarkable archeological site in the world and more than three million visitors stampede through it every year. But if the new tourism councillor for Campania has his way, the numbers visiting Pompeii will be drastically cut, and the site will be thrown open to multinationals for private events to rake in the money needed to maintain the ruins.

"If we cap the number of visitors it will be easier to allow businessmen within the ruins to make money and hold events without being hampered by cultural fuddy-dud-

dies," Claudio Velardi says.

"By controlling the number of visitors we could ... increase revenue by offering an opportunity to firms like Google or Microsoft to use the site for a private event."

He said he planned to talk to Pixar and Warner Bros about leasing the ruins as movie sets.

"There's nothing scandalous about that," he insisted. "They do it at the Museo del Prado and the Louvre and Fendi even rented the Great Wall of China for a fashion show, paying an outrageous sum to the government in Beijing."

Mr. Velardi is a powerful political fixer from Rome and former right-

hand man of the former prime minister Massimo D'Alema, but his vision of Pompeii's future was dismissed out of hand by experts.

Piero Guzzo, the archeological superintendent for Pompeii, the man with responsibility for what happens on the ground, responded stonily: "I have not yet had a talk with the new councillor. I hope to meet him as soon as possible so we can discuss all issues of common interest."

But he pointed out off the record that private money had by no means been shut out of the site.

*The Independent, London*



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