



**L**ouis Vuitton valiantly battled pounding rain on an Italian island paradise while presenting its cruise collection Wednesday night, the weather sending celebrity guests underneath umbrellas and dampening a hairdo or two. But when you're the flagship brand within the powerhouse LVMH portfolio, with a guest list that includes Catherine Deneuve, Cate Blanchett and Emma Stone, what's a little rain?

Bad weather was likely not top of mind when the storied luxury label led by Nicolas Ghesquiere chose the tiny Isola Bella, a jewel of an island in the azure waters of Lake Maggiore, as an appropriately jaw-dropping venue for its Cruise 2024 collection. But the rain arrived nonetheless, forcing the show originally planned for the island's formal terraced gardens to take place within the baroque Palazzo Borromeo, still owned

# Louis Vuitton braves rain on its Italian island paradise



by the family of the same name whose noble ancestry dates to the 13th century.

"It's the one thing Nicolas can't control, is the weather," the editor-in-chief of Vogue Thailand, Ford Laosuksri, told AFP after the show, as guests lingered to sip bubbly while hoping (in vain) for the rain to stop. Laosuksri was wearing a crocheted floral top and sandals — an endearing

if not foolhardy gesture amid the steady rain.

"I didn't want to ruin my velvet shoes," he confided. Ghesquiere, Louis Vuitton's artistic director since 2013, sent models through the ornate, high-ceilinged rooms of the 17th-century palazzo in eclectic, futuristic creations for which he is celebrated. Some looks recalled scuba gear adorned with avant garde ruffling, while others felt like fencers' uniforms, protective with thick quilting over the chest.

Fabric was cinched tight like an accordion at the bodice of a sleeveless dress with color blocks in royal blue and yellow gold, imparting texture and movement, while a shiny black dress came with a drawstring neckline that called to mind a popular handbag by the brand. Sweaters became more airy with a translucent stripe

at the midriff, while three chiffon gowns cut on the bias — in dusty pink, sea green and baby blue — sported exaggerated puffy sleeves worthy of the Edwardian age. "It was beautiful, it was flowy but still powerful," said Philippine actress Heart Evangelista.

### From fishing to fashion

Louis Vuitton's event was the first-ever fashion show allowed on

Isola Bella, a former fishing village transformed by the Borromeos into a sumptuous paradise fit for royalty. Kings, queens and emperors have been guests at Palazzo Borromeo over the years, including Queen Victoria, Napoleon and Josephine, and even Prince Charles and Princess Diana in 1985. On Wednesday celebrities and influencers from around the world — including US actress Jennifer Connelly and Felix from K-Pop's Stray Kids — descended on the island.

Trying not to slip, guests took cover under the transparent umbrellas provided by the brand before escaping into the palazzo. Following the show, some guests stood on benches and posed for pictures under the watchful gaze of centuries of Borromeo elders whose portraits line the walls.

Cruise collections are designed to offer warm-weather wardrobes for jet-setters lucky enough to escape to sunny locales during the drab winter months. In recent years, they have become destination events, with brands choosing more and more exotic spots to backdrop their luxury looks. Louis Vuitton's show comes on the heels of Dior's, which showed a Frida Kahlo-inspired cruise collection in Mexico City Saturday, and Chanel's earlier this month at Hollywood's Paramount Studios. — AFP



Models walk during the dress rehearsal of the Louis Vuitton Cruise 2024 fashion show in Isola Bella, a small island on Lake Maggiore, near Stresa. — AFP photos