

# Tears, truffles and treats beneath terracotta tiles

GILES BROADBENT

## RIMINI

**Giles Broadbent** goes on an eating odyssey in Italy and, suddenly, life tastes very good

**Y**ou have a secret; you find some hidden treasure; you get the scoop. Two things to be done at this point. You can keep it to yourself and develop an ulcer in later life, or you can burst forth with the news, ruddy-faced and relieved.

But then everyone knows your secret, everyone knows the location of the hidden treasure and it ceases to be a secret and it ceases to be hidden.

Which is a good thing, I suppose. Or a bad one, depending.

And so it is with the Belvedere in Saludecio, a rustic family-run restaurant and guest house in the heart of sweeping olive country of northern Italy.

On a four-day trip that burst belts and tested taste buds, the sampler menu in this open, modern, effusive farmhouse stood head and shoulders above every other experience of the trip – including quad biking through the Apennines, landing chaotically to relieved cheers at Rimini airport with Ryanair, and throwing open shutters on to sun-blistered countryside (in true *A Room With A View* style).

The meal was, as I told the chef, simply one of the most amazing culinary experiences of my life. In the manner of BBC documentaries, it was less of an event and more of an emotional journey. There might have been tears – there was



Above, at the Fiera Nazionale del Tartufo Bianco at Sant'agata Feltria, the earthy smell of truffles fills the air. Right, the fortified village of Montegradolfo



**FACTFILE**

- We flew Stansted to Rimini via Ryanair (£15.99)
- The Hotel Oste del Castello (ostedelcastello.it) is a four-star modernised hotel, (80-120 euros) on a village square built upon a network of caves and tunnels, some of them now housing a spa.
- The DuoMo hotel in Rimini (duomohotel.com) is a funky,

- stylish hotel designed by Ron Arad with starship chrome, space pods and Swedish style wet rooms. Rooms around 125 euros in spring.
- Expect to pay: 40 euros for a mid-priced dinner with wine; 250 euros for compact hire car for a week.
- Go to emiliaromagna turismo.it/english/

certainly sweet pork and fish and little jars of truffle things and pasta so light that small muscular angels were employed to heave on gossamers to keep the construct tethered to the plate.

I shook the owners firmly by the hand and looked them straight to their eye – mine moistened, theirs widened, retreating and alarmed – and I told them with that inflated zeal that is fuelled by a full stomach and a tipsy afternoon brain that I would tell the world about this place. I would be the

John the Baptist for the Belvedere (belvederesaludecio.it). So this is me keeping my part of the deal. Go there. Eat something. Look at the world anew.

And to think, a day earlier on this culinary odyssey I had been almost blown away and wiped out by another modern delight – Il Piastrino in Pennabilli (piastrino.it) which saw more delicately compiled pieces of art, placed on slates and in scooped dishes and accompanied by brilliant, complementary wines.

At that point I figured that life couldn't get much better and, certainly, there was no way it could get more Italian. Little did I know...

Rimini, I was informed, as my stomach purred like a silken cat, circled and settled itself, is the somewhat overlooked neighbour of Tuscany.

It has many of the same delights – same climate, countryside, aspirations – but there's a bureaucratic that placed land to the west of Rimini into the east of headline-grabbing Tuscany.

So the district of Rimini – which circles San Marino – is claiming the territory, giving some of the overlooked Tuscan districts top billing in the Rimini fold. "New entry municipalities" is the benign expression as opposed to the all-out bloody feuds between the Malatestas and the Montefeltros that marked much of the region's history and certainly shaped its

castle-topped architecture.

Local food and wine were the theme of my visit but it could have easily encompassed other strands – history, architecture, geology, supercars – or simply watching the world go by.

Instead the stomach would take an onerous and delightful beating. We hopped between wine tasting with cooked meats and cheeses at the achingly beautiful countryside village of Verucchio.

In the modern Hotel Oste del Castello we gathered in the cool cellar, ate, drank the local Sangiovese wine ("the blood of Jove") and heard tales of the M&M feud that prompted an arms-and-castle race, each of the two rivals sculpting their will on to a landscape of bleached buildings, terracotta tiles, Romanesque churches and brutish castles.

We tiptoed through sleeping villages upon cobbled streets with ochre houses studded with brilliant



## OTHER FOODIE IDEAS

● Provence offers fresh ingredients, fine wines and, occasionally, celeb chefs on tour

● The Cote d'Azur has more Michelin stars than any other coastline

## Five places to visit



### SAN LEO

The imposing rock of San Leo dominates the Marcchia Valley and the castle became a stronghold of the Malatesta regime. Later it became a jail where the Rasputin-like occultist Cagliostro (1743-1795) was held. His cell is still a major gathering point for Freemasons.



### DESIGNER VILLAGES

If Barcelona has Gaudi, then Pennabilli has Tonino Guerra, poet, set designer and creative partner of Federico Fellini. Look out for his snails. For a similar experience, Saludecio has rich walks, neat murals and splendid views restored by fashion designer Alberta Ferretti



### MONDAINO

Below another castle, along more cobbled streets and past an anonymous building that claims to be the first Rothschild's bank, is a clammy cellar where the rich fossa cheese is made. Its name ("pit") derives from the holes in which banks of cheeses are placed to ferment and develop.



### MONTEFIORE

The castle of Montefiore is another bulwark of the Malatesta dynasty, now upgraded to within an inch of its life and including a puppet theatre. The castle, reputed to be haunted, overlooks valleys and hence became an important front between German and Allied forces



### RIMINI

Funky and stylish Italian boutiques make this a perfect (and expensive) place to dump the euros while a beach offers fresh air and seafood. Fortification for the mind comes in the form of the dazzling Roman mosaics and uncovered ruins that dot the town.

FOODIE



Patrons Francesca Casadei and Mauro Riccardelli use local ingredients and wines to bring together a sumptuous menu at the Belvedere



Top, veal pasta with braised beef, above left, a cut of pork with quince and mushroom, above right, roasted grey mullet, crushed potato and beet tops and an ice cream cone were among the sampler plates at the Belvedere

ochrome houses studded with brilliant geraniums so effortlessly and impeccably Italian that they had the feel of a Hollywood film set.

We glad-handed through a colourful truffle fair, celebrating the odd, earthy, expensive fungus that is shaved, sprinkled and worshipped in these parts.

The Fiera Nazionale del Tartufo Bianco at Sant'agata Feltria finds this huge throbbing comestible at its heart – the heady odour pervades the town square and thoughts turn to celebrations.

Forget a setpiece meal, a walk among the stalls of confectionery, cheeses, wines, oils, spices, meats is an eight-courser on its own. Diffident Brits initially decline the offer of slivers of this and sips of that (health and safety, mate) but the atmosphere is convivial and the hard sell is underplayed.

Eat, drink, be merry, say no thanks to a purchase and be on your way. Nobody minds so much. Finally, seafood. The interior is based on farm produce but Rimini itself, on the Adriatic, has a thriving fishing port that feeds old town restaurants, like the La Marianna which piles high prawns and sardines, risotto and pasta. Or for lunch, the signature piadina, the Fiat bread filled or

**DREAM HOLIDAY**



Galapagos Islands... because Charles Darwin, thousands of giant tortoises and a million flexible finches can't be wrong Gilles Broadbent

**SKING**  
**The 10 best places to live the high life**

**Lucia Blash** on the top resorts to be hitting this winter



LOUISA EMERY

- 1 Whistler, Canada:** Whistler and Blackcomb form the biggest ski area, with the longest runs, in North America. With an average of more than 400 inches of snow a year, this resort is the perfect ski destination with 12 bowls, three glaciers and more than 200 marked trails.
  - **It's a fact:** Whistler is named after the shrill whistle sound of the Western Hoary Marmot.
- 2 Zermatt, Switzerland:** Less glitzy than its neighbours Gstaad and St Moritz, Zermatt is considered Switzerland's top ski resort. Thanks to its car-free environment, this picture-perfect village is the ideal place for those wishing to escape the hustle and bustle of daily demands.
  - **It's a fact:** Zermatt is the Alps biggest heliskiing centre.
- 3 Vail, Colorado, US:** Long considered America's top winter resort, Vail, with its enviable 5,300 acres of skiable terrain, is the largest single ski area in the US. Vail is home to one of the finest ski and snowboard schools in the world.
  - **It's a fact:** Vail is home to the world's highest botanical garden – The Betty Ford Alpine Gardens.
- 4 Kitzbuhel, Austria:** While St Anton can brag of being Europe's liveliest ski resort, Kitzbuhel is considered the Jewel in the Alps' Crown. Possibly the most famous resort in the Austrian Tyrol, the 700-year-old village offers visitors a charming alpine escape, found between the mountains Hahnenkamm and Kitzbuhler Horn.
  - **It's a fact:** Kitzbuhel's Cable Car Museum boasts a virtual ski simulator featuring the resort's Streif Ski run.
- 5 Banff and Lake Louise, Canada:** Located in the heart of Canada's Banff National Park, Banff and Lake Louise ranks as one of the most scenic mountain resorts. Banff and Lake Louise has three different ski areas – Mount Norquay/Mystic Ridge; Sunshine Village; and Lake Louise – offering rugged beauty, unspoiled landscapes, and pristine mountain ranges. *The Insider's Guide To The Best Canadian Skiing* labelled Norway as "an unforgiving
- 6 Chamonix, France:** No ski resort Top 10 would be complete without an appearance from Chamonix. Brought to prominence when it hosted the world's first Winter Olympic games in 1924, Chamonix, located at the foot of Mont-Blanc, offers the highest peak in the Alps and is home to one of the world's longest runs: the 13.7-mile-long Vallée Blanche.
  - **It's a fact:** Chamonix is a snow track on Sony's *Gran Turismo* driving game.
- 7 Stowe, Vermont, US:** One of the most picturesque ski resorts, Stowe offers traditional New England charm and unparalleled terrain. At 4,393 feet (1,339m), Mount Mansfield is Vermont's highest mountain and is great for intermediate to expert skiers. The lower altitude Spruce Peak is perfect for beginners. Little wonder Stowe has earned the tag, the ski capital of the American East Coast.
  - **It's a fact:** Stowe is home to The Trapp Family Lodge established by the Famous Von Trapp family, immortalised in the film *The Sound of Music*.
- 8 Cortina, Italy:** If you're looking for a touch of Cortina, the leading resort of the magnificent Dolomite Region, is the place to be. Long the playground of Italy's aristocracy and rich, this historic village is brimming with the trappings of wealth: Ferraris, furs and fabulousness.
  - **It's a fact:** In 1956, the magnificent Cortina Olympic Ice Rink was built – a great place for celeb watching.
- 9 Val d'Isère, France:** Val d'Isère and neighboring Tignes incorporate everything French skiing is famous for: There's an old village core, popularly known as Val Village, now turned into a chic yet informal resort with its challenging pistes, amazing off-piste terrain, and a vertical of more than 5,000 feet.
  - **It's a fact:** Val d'Isère was featured in *Absolutely Fabulous* as the ski resort du jour of Edina and Patsy.
- 10 Aspen, Colorado, US:** The destination of choice for the rich and famous, Aspen is the place to ski and be seen. Luxury accommodation, five-star restaurants and bars, fabulous shopping and excellent skiing facilities make Aspen a must-visit destination. As well as fantastic groomed intermediate runs, Aspen Mountain is also a great choice for experts, who can access hundreds of acres of off-piste terrain.
  - **It's a fact:** Famous residents of Aspen include Melanie Griffiths and Antonio Banderas; Kevin Costner and Michelle Pfeiffer.

**WINTER**



Saludecio is quiet, beautiful and typically Italian

dipped or stacked where the Nud e Crud has taken the old staple and given it a revisionist twist.

The Ryanair flight (Stranded to Rimini) may have wobbled incoherently on landing but it was as sturdy as a steam train on take-off, the (unpaid for) excess beneath belt buckle and shirt top providing the steady ballast.

Ahh, to be in Rimini again... Eat nothing for two weeks beforehand and then binge recklessly – I'm sure that's what NHS Direct would tell me if I asked.