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WHEN IT'S JUST THE TWO OF YOU



## An Intimate Italian Tasting Tour for Two

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# An Intimate Italian “Tasting” Tour for Two

## Feeding the Senses

by  
Gary and Kita de Sesa

If you’ve already delighted in the traditional must-see menu tour of Italy – e.g. the Coliseum, Forum and Sistine Chapel in Rome; the Duomo, Uffizi Gallery and Ponte Vecchio in Florence and St. Mark’s Square, the Grand Canal and the Doges Palace in Venice, you may want to experience a more hedonistic-style “tasting tour” of this magnificent country, where you will be vacationing more like a native than a tourist. This was our desire as we planned the celebration of our wedding anniversary and renewal of our vows. We had already been to Italy on our honeymoon, and spent a month circumnavigating the country by car, attempting to see as many of the important sights as possible. We returned to conceive our son and then again with our son to show him the country of his heritage.

We wanted our celebration tour to be private, romantic, sensual and relaxing and it was all of that and more -- like a gourmet tasting menu with a touch of the best culinary sensations. From high altitudes to low altitudes; from mountains to lakes to seas; from high tech accommodations to centuries-old castles; from luxury dining to a picnic lunch, all accompanied by delicious food and wines of each region. So may we offer as an

### Aperitif:

*Verbier, Switzerland – the Nevai Hotel (Room 221) – 159 km./99 mi. ~1 hr. 44 mins. from Geneva International Airport; 279 km./173 mi. ~2 hr. 52 mins. from Zürich International Airport*  
[www.nevai.ch](http://www.nevai.ch) Email: [nevaihotel@kingsverbier.ch](mailto:nevaihotel@kingsverbier.ch) Attention: Anne-Françoise Rosset

Now, why would you start an Italian tour in Switzerland? There are a few reasons, the first being Swiss International Airlines. Swiss International is ranked as one of the best airlines. Typically Swiss, they have a passion for perfection so their on-time record and maintenance of their aircraft is excellent. As a people, they are warm and friendly, making service and the entire flight experience on board a pleasure. To add to your jetting enjoyment, there is a full array of entertainment, from movies to games on your personal seat monitor.

*Travel Tip: American Express has a “companion seat” agreement with Swiss International. Buy an economy fare ticket and get a seat for your companion for just the tax plus 30,000 points.*

Second, if you are renting a car, as we were, it’s better for your rental to initiate in Switzerland, since it is one of the countries where you can waive the loss and damage insurance if you use the American Express card. (For some inexplicable reason, you can’t do this in Italy.)

*Travel Tip: We got our best deal from Hertz Rental. Don’t assume that because they are #1, that they’ll be the most expensive. They beat everyone’s price including all the European car rental companies. Our car had low mileage and was in immaculate physical and mechanical condition.*

Third and most importantly, Switzerland is a great place to decompress from the stress of preparing for your journey, the airport ritual, the eight-hour flight (as pleasant as it may be) and the six-hour change in time.

Verbier is a beautiful little Swiss town up in the mountains, where the air is fresh and the scenery is magnificent. The drive from Geneva Airport along the lake to Verbier is



brehtaking. We found the Nevaï Hotel to be the perfect place to catch our breath, settle in and relax and get very cozy. The Nevaï is not the typical mountain chalet format, but a sleek contemporary design that has not lost its warmth. Our corner terraced room, the eider down comforters, the sensual mountain breezes and super-comfortable bed make ideal conditions for romping and resting. All in all, a perfect atmosphere is created for clearing one's head. Email Anne-Françoise Rosset and request a room facing south for a panoramic view of the Alps. If you want total peace and quiet, make sure that you book reservations before or after the Verbier Music Festival (mid-July through the first week in August). If you love classical music, then you may want to partake of this musical feast. Two golf courses are available, one very easy and one very challenging (complete with grazing sheep.) One thing you should not miss is the traditional Swiss *raclette*, a meal of melted cheese, scraped in front of a fire, then onto your plate. It is accompanied by small firm potatoes, pickled onions, and dried meat,



such as prosciutto. If you dine at *La Marmotte*, high on the mountain, the sound of distant cow bells adds to the Swiss charm. <http://www.lamarmotte-verbier.com/>

*Travel Tip: Have no fear about driving the Swiss or Italian roadways. Whether on the super highway autostrada, mountain passes, or hairpin turns on the Amalfi coast, all are easily negotiated and superbly maintained. New vistas abound at every turn. Majestic mountains, unexpected waterfalls, ancient towns*



*rising up from the distant rocks and hills, vineyards and olive groves, fields of corn, wheat and sunflowers, all enhance the private romance of traveling together on the road. Driving speeds have moderated over the years. Even though signals for changing lanes are not used as often as in the past, drivers' actions are predictable and courteous. There is no ego on the road and drivers will quickly move to the right to allow passing. In the thousands of kilometers we drove, we didn't see a single accident. The roadways are replete with SOS boxes, shoulders and rest areas. The Autogrill that you will find at the service areas is worth a visit. The bathrooms are immaculate and the store area is like a mini-mall. The food area is like a New York City gourmet restaurant and grocery store with pastas, Panini, wines, cheeses, olive oils, breads, and produce items. You can also purchase phone cards, CDs, toys and tech items. And speaking of tech, many of the Autogrill service areas are equipped with Wi-Fi. Use your imagination and pick up some items for a little impromptu picnic. Don't forget to pack your favorite CDs from home – especially the ones you think will best accompany the Swiss and Italian scenery.*

*Travel Tip: Another tech item which is a must when driving is a GPS unit, which you can bring separately if your rental car is not already equipped with one. Not only will you save time by not getting lost, but you can spend more time caressing, not cursing. You can easily find restaurants, gas stations, or most any point of interest you wish. GPS along with printed Google directions from [www.googlemaps.com](http://www.googlemaps.com) will serve you well. With Google Maps, in the "to" and "from" boxes, you can type in the names of the hotels and it will give you turn by turn directions, and in most cases, photographs of the actual streets. Make sure to select satellite view for the most interesting display of your journey.*

### Appetizer:

Moving on to our appetizer, the surprise special of the day is:

*Sulzano, Italy – Hotel RivaLago (Room 208) – 335 km./208 mi. ~3 hrs. 55 mins.  
[www.rivalago.it](http://www.rivalago.it). Email: [info@rivalago.it](mailto:info@rivalago.it) Skype: [rivalago](https://www.skype.com/name/rivalago) Attention: Antonela Pastore*

*RivaLago is "Paradise Found" – if you have the desire to find it!*

Just fourteen short and beautiful kilometers off the Palazzolo exit of the autostrada heading toward Venice, is a hidden jewel if there ever was one. This is such a best kept secret, that even the Michelin Guide missed this gem. The RivaLago hotel is just 20 miles from Brescia and 35 miles from Bergamo. The entrance to RivaLago itself is mysterious and somewhat adventurous as you take a sharp left off of the tiny main road into an even tinier driveway to an unassuming entrance. But what lies beyond the entrance is magnificent – a beautiful hotel



overlooking Lake D'Iseo, a lake so large that it is visually endless, with overlapping mountains sprouting up as its backdrop. As you walk into the lobby of RivaLago, you are immediately welcomed with the scent of fresh flowers and the warmest greeting by the staff and the managers, Antonella and Gianluca. The hotel is wonderfully decorated – a tasteful mix of stylish contemporary and luxury lakeside. As you cross the lobby, you can't help notice the large, immaculately clean and inviting pool, which adjoins the lake, almost as one. The rooms are equally tasteful with relaxing colors and furnishing with balconies and terraces overlooking the lake and mountains. We had a double lake view with balcony. Every modern convenience is available in the room including internet access. Everything says "you are in full vacation mode, here." The rooms are reasonably priced for the luxury provided and motor boats, bicycle, and motor scooter rentals are available for an additional fee.



Breakfast includes an array of organic honey (miele) from five different regions of Italy, organic (da Agricoltura Biologica) jams, preserves, breads, seed, rice cakes, juices and cereals. Hard boiled eggs are cooked to exactly 8 minutes and you have your choice of prosciutto or the most delicate sliced ham. For the even more specifically health conscious, Gluten free Magdalenas, soy milk,

and special salt-free seasonings are also included in the breakfast buffet. If you would like breakfast served in your room, you may advise the front desk the night before.



If you have a special request, Gianluca gladly goes to the market and tries to provide whatever is asked. Yet, with all this carefully planned delicate abundance, if you require pancakes, omelets, potatoes and bacon, you are better off staying at a Marriot.

The restaurant is indoor or outdoor, but outdoor dining overlooking the lake can't be beat for romance. The food presentation is excellent with unique choices either in a tasting menu at a fixed price or a la carte. As night falls, candles are lit all around to create an even more magical setting. For an extra-intimate dining experience, a table as close to the water as you can get, should be reserved ahead of time.



If you are anywhere near this area of Italy, certainly on your way to Venice, and want to really rest, relax and romance in a quiet and secluded Mediterranean style getaway, don't miss the opportunity to indulge at RivaLago. Antonella's goal is to make all her guests feel as comfortable as if they were in their own home. And achieve this, she most certainly does. In all of our travels, we count this as among our best unexpected finds.

*Travel Tip: It's a good idea to email hotels directly when booking your reservation. Include any special requests or needs you may have. Take a copy of your emails with you on your trip in case any misunderstandings occur.*

### Sorbet:

Asolo – Villa Cipriani (Room 201) – 205 km./127 mi. ~ 2 hrs. 29 mins.

<http://villaciprianiasolo.com> Email: [villacipriani@HO10.net](mailto:villacipriani@HO10.net) Attention: Sigfrido Magagna



As you're traveling to Venice, you need a stopover and a perfect choice is Asolo, an enchanting town that seduced famous royalty, poets, and lovers to choose it as their home. The Villa Cipriani prepares your travel palate for the sophistication of the Venice experience. It has a British-Italian flavor with rooms in old-world décor and an intimate, romantically lit garden in which you can stroll and dine. The food maintains the high standard of the rest of the hotel. (Try the *Branzino*, Italy's Sea Bass). We had a spacious deluxe room, garden view with sitting area, separate bathroom and closet quarters, surrounded by wood-paneling, ultra-high beamed ceilings and antique furnishings. As repeat guests, champagne, fruit, and a personal note from the manager were waiting for us in the room. Caterina, a woman in a man-dominated profession, was as efficient a concierge as she was gracious.

First Course:

Venice – San Clemente Palace Hotel (Room 334) – 69 km./43 mi. ~ 1 hr. 25 mins.

<http://sanclemente.hotelinvenice.com> Email: [mzanconato-sanclemente@thi.it](mailto:mzanconato-sanclemente@thi.it)

Attention: Signore Michele Zanconato

*Travel Tip: As you will need to park your car on the mainland, our recommendation, as well as the recommendation of the San Clemente is to park at the Garage San Marco in Piazzale Roma. The cost is 30 Euros a day. Make a reservation ahead of time by contacting them at [info@garagesanmarco.it](mailto:info@garagesanmarco.it). From there you can take a water taxi directly to San Clemente. You can email [info@venicewatertaxi.it](mailto:info@venicewatertaxi.it) and negotiate a price of 70 to 80 Euros. If you book a return trip at the same time, you may be able to get the lower rate. The nice thing about Venice Water Taxi is that you can leave your partner with your luggage between the Calatrava Bridge and Hotel Santa Chiara while you park your car. Then call Venice Water Taxi at 0335230896 and they will pick you up in a few minutes.*

*Travel Tip: If you need a cell phone for travel, we found the best deal at [www.brightroam.com](http://www.brightroam.com), even though most of the internet articles recommend [www.cellularabroad.com](http://www.cellularabroad.com). If you just need an international chip, you can get one for \$4.99 at [www.rebelfone.com](http://www.rebelfone.com).*

Mmm, Venice! Venice is Venice, right? Not when you're staying at the San Clemente Palace Hotel. Only seven-years old, the newest addition to the five-star luxury hotels, is a



magnificent two-hundred room oasis, occupying its own island, the entire four-acres of Isola San Clemente. Though the hotel is new, the grounds themselves are centuries old and restoration of all the buildings and open courtyards have been meticulous. It lives up to its palatial name with an imposing entrance, but the moment you step off the boat onto the private dock, the

staff makes you feel as if you are the only guest. You are referred to by name, even by personnel you've never met before. The staff is young, vital and intelligent, and we must mention the consummate professionalism of head concierge, Alessandro Heinrich and Sales

and PR Manager Linda Bertoni. Alessandro has a wealth of knowledge of all things Venetian and Linda expertly arranged our accommodations.

Upon entering the lobby you are again struck by the immensity of its structure and the luxury



and elegance of its decor. It is an impressive walk to your room through the grandeur of its hallways, adorned with Murano chandeliers suspended above granite floors, and carved stone staircases. We were fortunate to have a Lagoon-view double deluxe room with long windows that opened up to a distant view of the domes of St.



Marks and the Campanille -- far enough to be alluring and close enough to be accessible. The San Clemente provides 24 hour complimentary boat service to and from St. Marks, which is only a ten to fifteen minute ride, but with a romantic itinerary. On the way from San Marco, it passes by San Giorgio, Giudecca and San Servolo before coming around the older side of the Island, with a view of the Church of San Clemente which dates back to 1131.



The property is large enough to house a sizable pool, 2 tennis courts and even a 3-hole executive golf course complete with a fountain. It's surrounded by a park and accompanied by brown and white bunny rabbits running through it. The Laguna Restaurant, overlooking the pool and park offers a plentiful buffet, grill, surf and turf menu and drinks of all varieties. You may also choose to relax at the Beauty and Wellness Center, set along the waters of the Lagoon, where you can be pampered with any number of aromatherapy treatments, thalassotherapy applications and massages. Or you can just unwind in the co-ed steam room, sauna and exercise room.



We had planned on renewing our vows in the Church of San Clemente, but since it is still being restored, the inviting exterior is betrayed by the gloomy interior. So we scouted the grounds for our special place. In a large courtyard, a long walkway provided the perfect isle for the bride to process, (in her original wedding dress we might add), until met by the groom who escorted her up the steep curved path to a gazebo on a hill overlooking the Lagoon.

Perfect. We recited our vows privately in the sight of God, cradled in the arms of the beauty surrounding us. Following the "ceremony," we had a luscious gourmet dinner, overlooking

the Lagoon and the Venetian backdrop at the San Clemente's own *Le Maschere* Restaurant. As the sun set before us in the elegance and privacy of this location, we rejoiced in the abundance – a feast for the eyes as well as the palate and we lost ourselves in the splendor of our love, attaining the living dreamlike state only lovers know.



We were “awakened” by the surprise fruit plate that came out with the words, “Happy Annyversary” decorating the rim of the dish in swirls of chocolate. The misspelling somehow



made the presentation that much more endearing. Is there anything that could have made this evening more perfect? Only a private midnight gondola ride that we decided to take impetuously. Still dressed in our wedding garb, we hopped the San Clemente boat to San Marco and found one gondolier willing to take us for a quiet, romantic ride through the back canals of Venice.



*Travel Tip: To avoid being really “taken for a ride” by a gondolier, be aware that official gondola rates are set by the city of Venice. You would do well to make yourselves aware of prices beforehand by visiting: <http://livingveniceblog.com/gondola-fares/>. You can also get a free weekly listings booklet issued by the Federation of Venice Hotel Concierges (get it from any hotel) where the Society of Gondoliers has a page. The 2009 rates are as follows: Daytime personalized and standard tours 40 minutes ride 80 €, maximum 6 people per gondola. For each additional 20 minutes €40. From 7pm to 8am: night-time personalized and standard tour € 100 40 min, maximum 6 people per gondola. For each additional 20 minutes € 50.*

We spent the following day on the crowded main land of Venice, a stark contrast to the serenity of the previous evening. Still, Venice is ever magnificent, regardless of the time, weather or amount of people.

*Travel tip: If you are using a mobile GPS unit, bring it with you to use for getting around Venice on foot, which can be somewhat confusing. There should be a setting on your unit for walking and it sure beats reading a map.*

For a second night of romantic dining, we would recommend the *Fortuny* Restaurant, the outdoor restaurant at the Hotel Cipriani, another five-star luxury resort on the Island of Giudecca. You can make your reservation online at [www.hotelcipriani.com](http://www.hotelcipriani.com). Ask for a table



by the Lagoon. Hopefully, you will catch the wonderful piano music provided by Massimo Nason, which wafts gently in the distance as you dine. After dinner, join Massimo at the cozy café for an after-dinner drink and enjoy this brilliant musician's vocal talents as well. He sings in a least four languages and can play music in any style.



Parting *is* such sweet sorrow as, inevitably, we must leave Venice. But we will find equally delicious “delicacies” to be tasted and memories to be made as we continue on our travel tasting journey.



Sorbet:

Florence – Marignolle Relais & Charme (Room 3) – 263km./154 mi. ~ 2 hrs. 47 mins.  
<http://www.marignolle.com> Email: [info@marignolle.com](mailto:info@marignolle.com) Attention: Lorenzo Bulleri

We clear our palate with Marignolle Relais & Charme, and a charmer it is. The Marignolle, located among the Tuscan hills only 3.5 kilometers from the autostrada is as intimate as the San Clemente is grand. After traveling up a long and narrow gravel road, you come to a large electronic gate, which opens once you have announced yourselves through the intercom system. Traveling a little further up and even more narrow road, you come to the main entrance. With only nine rooms, arriving at the Marignolle is like coming back to your summer estate in Tuscany. You are greeted, usually by a member of the Bulleri family and after a quick check-in, you are briefly shown around the facility, which includes a doll-house looking sitting room-library with fireplace. Adjacent, is the semi-enclosed glass gazebo breakfast room.





Gardens exuding scents of roses, lavender and rosemary surround the property and down a staircase off the gardens is a nice sized pool with a view of the countryside. In the distance,



you can see a small “Bibe” sign, which is the recommended restaurant for lunch or dinner. After settling in to our cozy soundproof double deluxe room, (equipped with all the amenities one would expect, including local wines), accomplishing some necessary internet communications using the free Wi-Fi and relaxing at the pool, we took the short drive down the hill and indeed had dinner at *Bibe*. The Bibe is a romantic outdoor trattoria, seemingly carved out in the middle

of a lush green forest, serving rustic Tuscan cuisine and wines. We recommend tasting the rare wild *ovoli* mushrooms, which are even more revered than *porcini*. The following day's activities may include a cooking class with Paola Bulleri or a golf outing with her husband, Claudio at the nearby Ugolino golf course or Florentine tours recommended by their son, Lorenzo.

Meat Dish:

Anguillara Sabazia – Country Relais I Due Laghi (Room 5 “Etruscan Suite”) –  
243 km./161 mi. ~ 2 hrs. 43 mins.

<http://www.iduelaghi.it> Email: [info@iduelaghi.it](mailto:info@iduelaghi.it). Attention: Fabio Fanciullis

Is this “wild” or “farm-raised?” . . . Both . . . and organic!

In a little more than two and a half hours, you will be transformed from the hills of Tuscany to the lakes of Roma. I Due Laghi (The Two Lakes) is between the lakes of Bracciano and Martignano and is immersed in the Regional National Park. The entrance to I Due Laghi feels more like visiting a farm-ranch than an organically certified 4-star hotel. Its pathway is lined with grazing horses of which there are 200 on the property. The other 400-plus inhabitants comprise hunting dogs, cows, goats and sheep. Before you even get to your room, the mood is set for rough and ready rustic romance. There are 25 rooms and 7 theme-suites. We chose the Etruscan Suite – a good choice for our taste, but you can check the web site for a picture of the room that appeals most to you. There are lots of activities for more dynamic duos, e.g. hiking,



biking, golfing, tennis and lake-sailing. Horseback riding is available but you must provide your own equipment. For more of a laid-back experience, a large outdoor pool and wellness center (with 36 beauty treatments of various modalities) is on the premises. The award-winning *La Posta de' Cavalieri* restaurant serves fresh food, organic meats and cheeses directly from their farm. We heartily enjoyed its offerings.

*Travel Tip: When you're dining in Italy, you will most likely indulge in pasta. Italians cook their pasta on the hard-side (al dente). So if you prefer your pasta not too chewy, request it "non troppo al dente."*

Fish dish "to die for":

Positano, – Buca di Bacco (Room 48) – 302 km./188 mi. ~ 3 hrs. 44 mins.

<http://www.bucadibacco.it> Email: [info@bucadibacco.it](mailto:info@bucadibacco.it) Attention: Salvatore Rispoli

♪ "From the mountains to the prairies to the ocean" right from Rome ♪

We promised contrasting landscapes on this journey and none is considered more spectacular than Positano, hence the expression, "see Positano and die." Getting to Positano by car is synonymous with traveling the Amalfi Drive. So if all your friends and your mother have you scared about it, don't be – you've already negotiated the Alps on this trip. Relatively, this is a piece of cake. There are safety stone guard rails along the road and the breathtaking vistas make this excursion a must. So be cautious but don't be scared.



*Travel Tip: The nearest parking lots to the hotel Buca Di Bacco are: Garage Mandara (open 24 hours), Parking Centrale, Garage Migliaccio and Garage Russo. Cost is 30-35 Euros. It's a steep five to ten minute walk to sea level so be prepared to pay 5 Euros per bag if you want a porter service to bring your luggage to the hotel.*

Our one exception to avoiding accommodations in city or town hubs was Positano. When we were younger and economically more reckless, we stayed at the San Pietro, an exclusive 5-star luxury hotel away from the center of town. So if you can afford it, by all means, indulge. But if you want more “bang” for your buck, think Buca di Bacco. The San Pietro, a large property, offers more spaciousness in the public areas, but less in the room accommodations. Buca di Bacco, owned by the Rispoli family, chose to make its public spaces cozy but be more generous with its rooms and private terraces. Hence, we had an enviable double superior corner room with a very large terrace facing the Tyrrhenian Sea. With a large table, seating area and two lounge chairs, the terrace was like our own private outdoor room, which we used for sunbathing, candlelight dining *al fresco* and moonlit intimacy. It's no wonder that Buca di



Bacco was #4 on Trip Advisor's Most Romantic Hotels in Europe for 2009. It's a short walk to the beach and promenade and both are worthy of a visit during the day and in the evening, where the nightlife (and the *gelati*) is particularly colorful.

We feel particularly confident walking into a restaurant which has an open kitchen that clientele can view. But the renowned Buca di Bacco restaurant goes a step further by putting its kitchen on full display through a big picture window which looks onto the street for all to see. Expertly preparing their recipes, the chefs smile and wave to the passersby, but the biggest smiles are on the customers who have the good fortune to partake of the delicacies. We recommend the *zuppa di pesce*, a harvest of the day's catch. It's to "die for!"

Sorbet Olé!:

Tivoli (Roma) – Torre Sant'Angelo (Room 214) – 261 km./162 mi. ~ 3 hrs. 3 mins.

<http://www.hoteltorresangelo.it> Email: [info@hoteltorresangelo.it](mailto:info@hoteltorresangelo.it) Attention: Barbara Costa

We clear our palate once more as our travel tasting menu heads North again toward our final offerings. Just 25 kilometers from Rome, old world elegance awaits you at Torre Sant'Angelo, a 2000 year-old medieval castle, restored to a 4-star luxury hotel, complete with a distinctive Roman-style swimming pool and waterfall.



On a previous visit, we had stayed at the renowned and grand Villa d'Este Hotel, which is nearby and well worth a visit. But this time, we wanted a more intimate experience and the Torre Sant'Angelo offers what we considered an irresistible package for two. It included accommodations in a suite, romantic candlelight dinner with sparkling wine, beautiful flowers served in our room, breakfast again in our room, and a late check out. It's called *Una Notte di Follia*, which translated could mean "night of folly," "madness," "craziness," "recklessness," "abandonment." *Alla follia* means "to be head over heels;" *farei follie* means "I'd do anything" - take your pick - it's all good! Our delectable meals were discreetly served to us *in camera* and our suite was totally conducive to the *follia* part, with its king-sized bed, and Jacuzzi master bathroom (in the turret of the castle.) The real surprise was the door that led onto our private rooftop terrace, which was the length of the hotel - all to ourselves! Right after dinner, we took advantage of our terrace as we grabbed a rose from our table, our iPod and two little battery-operated speakers and under the stars, Tangoed the night away - well not the whole night. Oh, did we mention the splendid views from the rooftop? Whatever.

How do you continue the magic of the Torre Sant'Angelo? Simple -- book another castle:

Cenerente (Perugia), - Castello del'Oscano (Room 208 "Tower Suite") -  
189 km./117 mi. ~ 2 hrs. 19 mins.

<http://www.oscano.com> Email: [info@oscano.com](mailto:info@oscano.com) Attention: Valentina Fratti



*Bread and Olive Oil:*

“May we have some more bread and olive oil, please?”

While many travelers are all agog with Tuscany, and justifiably so, a secret is that the lesser publicized Umbria is just as beautiful. Seven minutes from the antiquity and culture of Perugia, amidst the forests that surround Monte Tezio, rises the majestic Castello del’Oscano. The drive to the castle is mysterious and enchanting as you take the long winding one-way road up through the woods. Castello del’Oscano sits on an immense property surrounded by flower gardens, olive groves and organically certified farm lands.

We were greeted most hospitably by Signora Fratti who took us on a tour of the castle and then, up the grand staircase to the sitting room and bathroom of La Torre, our tower suite. To our surprise, it was another 26 spiral stone steps up to the round four-poster bedroom chamber with turret windows which opened onto the Umbrian hillsides. We were among the treetops looking down at the birds. For those of us who don’t want an aerobic workout with each trip to the room, there is an elevator approach. The furnishings were in keeping with medieval taste yet integrated with contemporary comforts. Like Sant’Angelo, our rooftop terrace was the entire length of the castle, but from here we were able to see both sunset and sunrise.



A new addition to the property is the three-year old infinity pool. It is a bit of a walk through the olive groves, but it is isolated on a promontory and perfectly private. Swimming was a joy and we worked up a large appetite for dinner. Memories from our last visit raised expectations for an exceptional meal and we were not disappointed.

The aroma of dinner cooking, fresh baked bread and coffee wafted up to our terrace. It was good to finally get our hands and palates onto the very things that were drawing us to the restaurant. The bread tasted as good as it smelled especially when dipped into the castle's own homemade olive oil, *La Macina* – the lightest and best we had ever tasted. The pasta was spectacular and most of the menu and wine selections came directly from the property's farm. Did we mention the bread and olive oil? And guess what we drove away with the next day, after a wonderful night's sleep and a divine buffet breakfast? Gifts from the hotel of a bottle of olive oil and hot bread for our journey.

*Travel Tip: Don't be shy about asking for a late check out if you need one. If the hotel doesn't need the room, they will be happy to let you stay and enjoy their facilities.*

#### Prosciutto and Parmigiano a la Parma:

*Samboseto di Busseto (Parma) – Palazzo Calvi (Room 2) – 357 km./222 mi. ~ 3 hrs. 36 mins.*  
<http://www.palazzocalvi.it> Email: [palazzocalvi@libero.it](mailto:palazzocalvi@libero.it) Attention: Michaelae

Even though Palazzo Calvi, an 18<sup>th</sup> century patrician villa, has lodging accommodations, it is best known as a shrine for Parmesan cuisine and an enoteca which houses thousands of bottles of wine. We had stayed at Palazzo Calvi before, and were anticipating another epicurean



adventure. So we were terribly disappointed to find the restaurant closed for renovations. However, the proprietor had arranged for us to dine in town at *Due Foscari* in Verdi square. How serendipitous, for we found the town enchanting at twilight -- music playing from the different cafes, and all dedicated to the town's pride, the great composer, Giuseppe Verdi. We selected only regional cuisine

and the dinner, from the Prosecco to the pasta, to the pastries, was perfection. Back at the Palazzo the next morning, we had a unique breakfast, as Michaelae proudly carved and served the Palazzo's own prosciutto (aged 14<sup>th</sup> months) along with fresh eggs, cheeses, fruit juice, croissant and memorable-tasting coffee. He continued to replenish our plates to our heart's content and concluded our stay with a personal tour of the Palace, wine cellar and catering facilities. It made us dream of having a wedding reception there.

High-Tech Chocolate:

Mövenpick Zürich Airport - Glattbrugg (Zürich), Switzerland (Room 728) – 461 km./286 mi. ~ 4 hrs. 39 mins. <http://www.Moevenpick-hotels.com> Email: [hotel.Zurich.airport@Moevenpick.com](mailto:hotel.Zurich.airport@Moevenpick.com)

The sweet end to our “tasting” tour was the completely renovated Mövenpick Zürich Airport Hotel. We booked this hotel through American Express and paid with points. Although a five-star hotel, pricing was very reasonable. The Mövenpick is only 2.4 kilometers from the airport which makes it easy to return your rental car and prepare for departure the next day. You may think that close proximity to the airport translates to congestion and noise. Not so. The environment surrounding the Mövenpick is rural, with cows grazing just around the corner. The rooms are totally soundproof, shielding any jet noise. The Mövenpick’s motto is “Passionately Swiss,” which means convenience, comfort and courtesy all the way. Once in the oval driveway of the hotel entrance, free portable baggage carts are positioned to easily transfer your luggage. A secure parking lot is adjacent to the hotel, but this will cost you \$30 for the night.

*Travel Tip: Save \$30. Drop your bags off at the hotel, and park for free around the corner by the cows. They’ll watch your car.*

At check-in, we were not only offered a welcome drink of orange juice, champagne or a mimosa, but a free upgrade as well. The public rooms are chic and include four restaurants, a fitness center and a business area with free computers and Wi-Fi. The bathrooms are a must see – with separate children’s sections and automated, digital, self-sanitizing toilet seats. Now that’s “passion!” The rooms are equally chic with sparkling white down comforters and all the amenities, including a high-tech individual-cup coffee maker with a selection of different

coffees and complimentary Swiss chocolates. Free bicycle rentals are available for exploring the surroundings and free shuttle buses are provided to the airport. The popular three hundred and thirty-three-room Mövenpick has the bustle of a cosmopolitan hotel, yet its Swiss penchant for anticipating needs helps to ease the intricacy of international travel.



### After Dinner Mint Reflections:

As we reflect upon our “tasting” tour, having partaken of eleven different locales, we remember: the sounds of the cascading Swiss waterfalls as we traveled through alpine passes; the feel of the Positano sun glowing on our skin; images of glacial lakes, Venetian canals and fields of sunflowers; the lingering bouquet of the wines we’ve tasted and indigenous culinary tastes all vying for first place.

But most of all, we feel the sense of fulfillment as “the miracle of the full glass” comes to mind. Just when you think an entirely full glass cannot accept another drop without overflowing, a drop, then more drops, and even more drops pour in and suddenly the glass has an infinite capacity for more. So, too, with a great travel itinerary – just when you think you have experienced everything to the fullest, you are amazed by your ability to savor further, and luxuriate in allowing your senses to reach their deepest potentials. ■

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. Gary de Sesa and Kita de Sesa have been making beautiful music together since they met at Juilliard. Gary is a pianist, conductor, composer, teacher and author who, after receiving his B.M, B.S. and M.M degrees from Juilliard, went on to earn his Ph.D. in music from New York University. He is also a graduate of Music & Art High School (LaGuardia). Kita was a dance and voice major at Juilliard with Radio City, Broadway, TV and movie credits. After Juilliard, she went on to receive her Master’s degree in Guidance Counseling and authored an innovative anti-smoking high school curriculum. Kita graduated from Performing Arts High School, the sister school of Gary’s Alma Mater. Kita and Gary have been fortunate not

only to have extensive solo careers, but to have been performing as a team since they met. They have played all the major concert halls of New York City and have concertized internationally in Italy, Switzerland and Russia. Together, they have produced over one hundred Broadway school musicals. Kita currently maintains a vocal studio on Long Island, NY for singers and actors, while Gary, who has just retired after thirty-three years of an award-winning teaching career, continues to compose and maintain a position as organist and choir director for a church and temple, also on Long Island.

Every eleven years, Kita and Gary renew their wedding vows and this year, on the celebration of their thirty-third Wedding Anniversary, chose to return to Switzerland and Italy, the countries of their honeymoon. They returned five years later to conceive a son (who, incidentally also studied at Juilliard), and then once more with their son for his sixteenth birthday to see the land of his conception and partial heritage -- Gary being an Italian-American and Kita a Russian, born in Paris.

In their first travel article collaboration, Kita and Gary capture and transmit, through their personal experience, both the practical and idealistic/romantic side of “intimacy travel.” Their new website, [www.intimacytravel.com](http://www.intimacytravel.com), will be dedicated to couples looking for that special getaway for “when it’s just the two of you.”