



See Italy and Live

By Joseph O'Neill

IN ITALY, IF SOMETHING IS WORTH DOING, IT'S DONE WITH GUSTO.



THE ITALIANS ARE RIGHTLY PROUD OF THEIR COUNTRY AND HAVE A SURE SENSE OF THEIR NATIONAL IDENTITY.

When the great German poet Goethe gazed out over the bay of Naples he was immediately entranced. It was for him the embodiment of Italy's enchanting combination of scenic beauty, vibrant culture and breath-taking art. Having experienced its wonders, his life was complete.

Anyone who's been to Italy agrees: it is a place of lasting joys. Nothing about Italy is throw-away or disposable. Everything, from the Parthenon and the Coliseum to a conversation on the street or a simple meal is a source of enduring pleasure. Sitting outside a patisserie during the Roman rush hour I was distracted from my custard pastry and cappuccino by a suited professional – an optician or a chartered accountant – wearing vibrant green shoes with a resplendent white Crocodile logo, stopping to greet a man with an Ernest Hemmingway beard.

In Britain such an encounter involves no more than a nod, requiring neither to break stride. Here it seems they immediately plunge into a heated debate about the fundamentals of life, with a plethora of shrugs, pouts and wild gesticulating, steepled fingers and rhythmic forefingers emphasising a point. Then, just as suddenly as their conversation began, it ends with smiles and handshakes, waves and much patting of shoulders. In Italy, if something is worth doing, it's done with gusto.

Here everything is not so much larger than life as bursting with life. So many of the famous locations and great works of art induce a sense of déjà vu because they are the foundations on which western civilization is built. Nothing disappoints. When you stand in St Peter's Square you realise that no description, no film, no photograph could possibly do justice to the great, sweeping embrace of Bernini's columns which gathers the whole world into God's embrace. And everything works on so many different levels. For instance, the Egyptian obelisk at the centre of the Square, brought to Rome by Caligula, once marked the finishing line of the great chariot race, the highlight of the games. Now it stands as an enduring monument to the first Christian martyrs, slaughtered as part of the games, but now at the centre of a Church inspired by their faith.

Inside the basilica it is impossible not to be overwhelmed by the scale and splendour of everything. When you see Michelangelo's Pieta you realise what all the fuss is about. It's not just that he's turned cold stone into living flesh: he's captured a mother holding the broken body of her son in desolation while offering it to the world in hope.

Yet the basilica of St. Peter's is more than a museum charting the history of the western world. I realised this as I approached the Baroque canopy of St Peter's tomb. I was wondering what attracted so many gleefully intense Japanese, whose culture gives them no handle on the west. Then I spotted two young Japanese praying, their hands joined like Renaissance angels brought to life.

One of the greatest experiences for any tourist is to step out of Venice's Santa Lucia station – a svelte, marble structure – and

cities crucifixes hang in shops and bars display prayers to Padre Pia.

Ideally, Italy is a place to savour, like Chianti Classico. Many visitors who thought owning their own holiday home was beyond their means have been pleasantly surprised by recent developments.

Fractional ownership is the smart and affordable way to buy a superb luxury holiday home in the beautiful countryside estate of Giacomo Leopardi, situated just below Montefiore dell' Aso on the Adriatic coast in Le Marche, a region which provides a vast range of year-round attractions in authentic Italy.

Appassionata's luxury development there consists of spectacular properties set in five acres with stunning views of the sea and mountains. The facilities have been created for all seasons and truly reflect the wonderful Italian lifestyle. The large swimming pool, all weather tennis court, private terraces, landscaped gardens, olive groves and newly planted vineyards offer plenty for everyone. If you're there in September you will experience the excitement of the grape harvest and see how the vineyard's annual production of 4,000 bottles of wine, which is shared between the owners, is made. In October and November the olive groves are harvested and the oil once more shared out.

look out onto the copper green waters of the Grand Canal. Immediately you are transported to the throng and bustle of the wealthiest and most opulent city of the high Renaissance. The crowded vaporetas ply the waters between gondolas and builders, transporting bricks and bags of cement. But this is the predictable wonder of Italy. Even better are the unexpected delights, joys which seem to creep up on you.

One such is Donatello's John the Baptist in the church of S Maria Gloriosa Dei Frari. You find yourself holding your breath in awe. It's such a powerful depiction of a man gaunt for God that you can smell the tang of his camel hair. Almost every piazza, every public building, has its own gem.

Yet the essential joy of this country is in the little things which make up the warp and weft of everyday life. It's a teenager, iPod wires sprouting from his ears, offering his seat to a heavily pregnant woman. It's an elderly lady, one hand guiding her husband, the other holding a single red rose. It's a young mother on the train, reading to her son, her voice like someone picking out a lullaby on a mandolin, his wide, liquid eyes transfixed. It's the maitre d' greeting you with a handshake the second time you visit his restaurant and offering complimentary drinks at the end of the meal. It's the unabashed pride with which a stranger tells you that Verona is the most beautiful city in the world and then, as an afterthought, mentions that it's his 'home town.'

The Italians are rightly proud of their country and have a sure sense of their national identity. Even in the most cosmopolitan

Whatever your interests you will find plenty to enjoy. Whether you prefer lying on the beach, skiing in the Sibillini Mountains, taking countryside walks, cycling through the rolling hills or just visiting one of the many fantastic local restaurants, vineyards or historic towns, you'll always have plenty to do. You can, of course, simply relax in your Italian country estate in a home with original art, antique furniture and high quality modern fittings. All, of course, without any of the responsibility or cost associated with such sumptuous surroundings.

The beauty of fractional ownership is that when you buy in you become one of the owners of a company which is limited by guarantee. Your entitlement to use of the property is yours until you decide to sell it. Most people buy in for an average of three weeks to ensure that they sample the full range of seasonal delights, confident in the knowledge that whenever they arrive they will always find their home in immaculate condition with everything they need to enjoy a memorable break.

Having seen this part of Italy, you will understand why having seen Naples, Goethe was ready to die. For most of us, however, Italy is nothing less than an affirmation of life which sharpens our senses and renews our capacity for joy.

On the Market

Restored Townhouse, Le Marche, nr Santa Vittoria

The perfect Lock & Leave property. A medieval townhouse which has been authentically restored to a very high standard with stunning panoramic views from the terraces. It is on 4 floors, has 4 bedrooms and plenty of space, inside and outside and just 35 minutes inland from the sea.

Price 450,000 euros (approx £400,000)

www.magicmarche.co.uk



Casa Giacomo on the Estate of Giacomo Leopardi, Montefiore dell'Aso, Le Marche, Italy.

Set in five acres of beautiful landscaped gardens, large pool, tennis court, vineyard, olive groves and magnificent sea and mountain views.

A spacious 2500 sq ft split over 2 floors, 4 bedrooms, 3 luxury bathrooms, large kitchen, dining room, lounge, laundry/cloakroom and lots of sun soaked terracing. Fireplaces on each floor, under-floor heating, entertainment system, Wii fit and wifi throughout.



Price:

£20,000 for one week's Fractional Ownership

3 weeks Fractional Ownership £55,000 (£18,333 per week)

5 weeks Fractional Ownership £91,000 (£18,200 per week)

www.appassionata.com

Restored House, Le Marche, nr San Ginesio

This beautiful house enjoys an elevated and private location with far reaching views of the Sibillini mountains and The Camerino national park is visible from the balcony. It has a private drive and is surrounded by fields and olive groves and easy access to local hill towns and supermarkets, shops etc. Restored in 2005, a high quality four bedroom and four bath family home, plus small garden and pool.

Price 460,000 euros (approx £410,000)

www.magicmarche.co.uk

