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Italy in America:

Philly's Tomato Base

A Philadelphian can spend his entire life arguing about cheese. *Locatelli*, *pecorino*, *provolone*, *Parmesan*. Buffalo milk *ricotta*. Cheez Whiz. No Cheez Whiz. You name it, every Philadelphian born is an expert created. With cheese steaks there's the added component of "with" or "without" — referring to onions — and whether the type of roll matters (of course it does!), escalating the complexity of the debate to *Puccini* heights.

Here food is sport, a studied and contested topic worthy of a PhD. Much food obsession can be traced to a strip of ramshackle row houses with corrugated roofs listing toward a narrow, pockmarked street in the city's cramped south end.

The *Ninth Street Italian Market* is the city's academy of food. It claims to be the oldest and largest outdoor market in the United States. Which just means that the debates have brewed for decades.

A century ago, it became the nexus for butchers and winemakers and cheese sellers importing from back home. Since then the number of stores has shrunk, which has generated a string of intense rivalries. The best cheese? *Claudio's* vs. *Di Bruno Bros*. Meat? A trifecta pitting *D'Angelo's* against *Fiorello's* against *Esposito's*. For *cannoli* you opt for *Termini's* or head to *Isgro's*. For cheese steaks line up at *Pat's* or *Geno's*, although some people throw off the symmetry by traveling farther south for a bite from *Tony Luke's*.

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DREAM OF ITALY

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Italy by Sea: Cruising the Med in Luxury

With 6,400 miles of coast line, Italy is ripe with opportunities to be explored from the sea. Some of the country's most intriguing small cities sit along the coast and besides revealing their own gems they provide gateways to inland points of interest. So much of Italy's culture comes from the sea, from the cuisine to the folktales. In history and geography, Italy is fatefully intertwined with its Mediterranean neighbors — onetime invaders or trading partners or both — each leaving its lasting mark on the other.

For all of these reasons, I decided I could not fully experience Italy without seeing it from the ocean. A few weeks ago, I boarded Silversea's *Silver Shadow* for a nine-day cruise between

Barcelona and Venice with stops in *Sorrento* (Italy), *Taormina* (Sicily), *Dubrovnik* (Croatia), and *Korcula* (Croatia). For the fifth time, this year *Silversea* was selected as the number one small-ship line in *Travel + Leisure* World's Best Awards. I hoped the small size of this cruise line (four ships) and this ship (holding a maximum of 388 passengers) promised to bring me closer to the Italy I love.

Silversea and Italy have an intimate relationship of their own. The Italian shipping family that once owned *Sitmar* Cruises started *Silversea* almost a decade ago. *Mandfredi Lefebvre*, the 50-year-old owner and chairman of *Silversea*, has homes in France and Italy and is often seen aboard one of the four ships he helped design.

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"Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll!" —Lord Byron



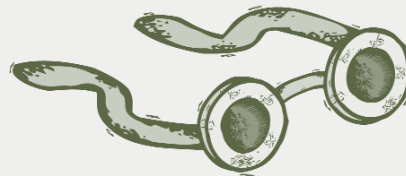
Ports of Call . . .



Sorrento: The *Silver Shadow* spent two full days in Sorrento, giving passengers the opportunity to explore this fascinating area. The ship anchored offshore and tenders (small boats) were used to ferry passengers to the dock where they could board a private bus to take them up the hill to the center of the town. The ferries and hydrofoils for Capri, Ischia and Naples were located at the same dock. This was convenient for me since I took a hydrofoil to Ischia (and then on to Procida) on the first day and one to Naples the next day. On the first day, my travel companions took the shore excursion to Pompeii (full day, \$88) and rated it one of the highlights of their trip, mostly because the guide was so knowledgeable. Other passengers embarked on *Capri Highlights*, a half-day guided tour of the island costing \$99 per person. On the second day, Silversea offered a shore excursion entitled *Amalfi Coast: Positano & San Pietro*, a full-day tour including lunch at a famous hotel for \$260 per person. *Flavors of Sorrento* offered passengers lunch at a nearby farm (\$82 per person). Due to this summer's extreme heat, some passengers did not stray far and spent a day on the ship or an afternoon shopping in Sorrento.

Taormina: This Sicilian port offered some of the more adventurous passengers a chance for some fun. The half-day shore excursion *Mt. Etna Drive* took passengers off-roading on the slopes of the volcano (\$60). Those who wanted to take in all the sites could book a full-day tour including a tour of the town of Taormina and an excursion to Mt. Etna (\$172). Since Taormina is slightly inland on a hill, it took at least a half-hour to get from the port to the town. I took advantage of Taormina's numerous shopping opportunities and stayed in town for lunch, followed by a visit to the Greek Amphitheater.

Venice: The captain invited all of the passengers to be on deck to view the stunning landscape as we sailed into Venice in the morning. Most of the *Silver Shadow's* passengers visited Venice on their own, probably due to the fact that so many had been there before. Silversea provided a water shuttle to take passengers from the port to St. Mark's Square. The cruise line offered some basic shore excursions including *Highlights of St. Marks* (\$69), *Scuola di San Rocco & Frari Church* (\$79.00), *Murano & Burano* (glassmaking tour, \$47) and *Gondola Evening Serenade* (\$90). Unfortunately, those who took the evening gondola serenade were very disappointed with the experience. The gondoliers said little to the guests instead spoke to each other on their cell phones while traveling through the canals. The boat ride also lasted 20 minutes less than was promised. Although Silversea can't be held responsible for the behavior of the gondoliers, several passengers urged the tour manager not to use the same ones again. My cruise ended on our second morning in Venice. I paid an extra \$100 to stay onboard until 5:00 p.m. during which time I had a place to store my luggage while I took a quick jaunt back into Venice. I also had a delicious lunch and a final swim before catching a late train.



Silversea's Other Italian Ports of Call

Amalfi, Ancona, Bari, Capri, Civitavecchia (Rome), Elba, Genoa, Livorno (Florence), Messina, Naples, Porto Cervo (Sardinia), Ravenna, Trapani, Trieste

“He’s very hands on and treats the ships as his personal yachts,” says Brad Ball, spokesman for Silversea. “We always make sure to have space available for him, especially on the Mediterranean cruises, since he lives so close by,” he adds. The officers on Lefebvre’s ships are Italian and many of the waiters also hail from his homeland. And of course, in keeping with Italy’s strong ship-making tradition, all of Silversea’s vessels are Italian-built. The Italian connection may have also helped bring opera star *Cecilia Bartoli* onboard several Mediterranean cruises this summer.

Silversea aims to provide a trip filled with ease and comfort. The ease starts with comprehensive pricing. The cruise-only fee features non-traditional items including: all beverages throughout the ship including wine, spirits and champagne; all gratuities; all port



charges; and on selected sailings, a special shore event called *The Silversea Experience*. “You feel like you are a guest. You don’t feel like you are a paying passenger because you don’t have to sign for things,” says Linda Coffman who runs the Web site, *Cruisediva.com*, and has sailed on Silversea three times.

Silversea also provides ease in the way of flexibility. Its *Personalized Voyages* program allows passengers to customize the length of their cruises and choose where they want to join and leave the ship. Especially in the Mediterranean, some passengers choose to stay on for two or more back-to-back sailings, which is especially

enticing since the ships rarely repeat the same ports during that amount of time. Conversely, Silversea is attracting more young professionals who only have time to stay onboard for five days or so. Had I wanted to keep my embarkation and debarkation points in Italy, I could have just as easily boarded in Sorrento instead of Barcelona.

A Silversea cruise costs between \$300 and \$850 or more per person, per day depending on the sailing and class of cabin. This is a 5-star line and as such the prices are high. With all that it is included — a stay in a large plush room; three full gourmet meals; all you can drink; transfers onshore; use of the pool and other facilities; service at the touch of a button and evening entertainment — the same amount or more could be spent staying in a 5-star hotel and paying for meals and extras separately.

Country Club at Sea

I knew this was going to be the trip of a lifetime when I first set eyes on my cabin. The midship veranda suite (at the mid-range of Silversea’s offering) is the size of a regular hotel room with a beautiful veranda overlooking the ocean. 75% of *Silver Shadow’s* cabins have verandas. My taste buds were welcomed with a bottle of champagne, a dish of caviar and a box of Godiva chocolates. The room has a queen-size bed, makeup vanity, couch, armchair, coffee table, desk, well-stocked mini-bar and entertainment system (including a VCR).

The best features lay behind closed doors. The walk-in closet was bigger than my closet at home. The bathroom featured double sinks, marble fixtures and both a shower and bathtub. My maid Anita, who hails from Iceland, introduced herself and said she would offer valet service twice a day. She then asked me at what time I would like to

have complimentary canapés delivered to my room each day.

As I explored the rest of the ship, I found the décor matched the understated elegance in my suite: neutral colors, beautiful wood finishes and inviting, yet elegant furniture. *Silver Shadow’s* public rooms include a library (stocked with books and videos), a computer center (with reasonable rates for Internet access), a fitness center, several large lounges (venues for some cocktail parties and the evening shows), a bar, a casino, gift shop and jewelry shop. Silversea’s vessels have the highest passenger-space ratio, so there’s always a place to find peace and quiet. And for peace and quiet of the pampering kind, Silversea offers *The Mandara Spa* on the top deck of the ship.

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DREAM OF ITALY

Kathleen A. McCabe
 Publisher and Editor-In-Chief

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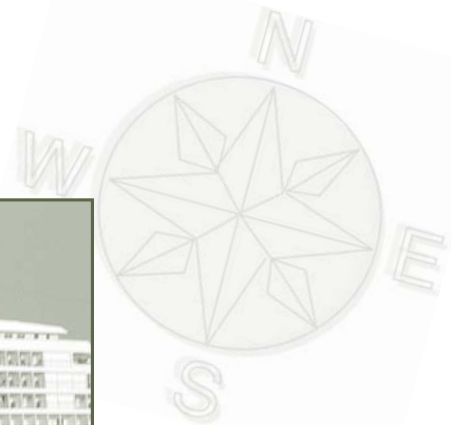
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card, but passion is the gale.” —Alexander Pope



Silversea does not disappoint . . .

4 Since the first day was a day at sea, I took the time to get acquainted with the hot Mediterranean sun poolside. It wasn't difficult to find an empty chair and the large pool and two Jacuzzis provided enough room for everyone to enjoy themselves without fighting for space. The waiters continually asked me if I wanted anything to drink and when lunchtime came around I could easily order right at the poolside grill. Those who didn't want to lounge around had the options of attending a lecture, a tour of the ship's bridge or trivia competition. One deck up from the pool, others took the time to walk laps, play shuffleboard and hit golf balls.

After a day in the sun, it was time for dinner and in this department, in fact with all meals, Silversea does not disappoint. A selection of four appetizers, three soups, a salad, a sorbet, four main dishes, pasta, a vegetarian dish and a selection of desserts are served by charming and professional waiters and waitresses. Each dish is expertly

matched with the finest wine. The ship also offers a *Cruiselite* menu for guests watching their weight. Passengers can arrive at open seating in the lovely dining room anytime between 7:30 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

Silversea also offers dishes specially created by *Relais & Chateaux-Relais Gourmands* and Silversea chefs. Guests can sign up for intimate, specialty dinners such as *Dinner Under The Stars*, which is held on the pool deck. While the gourmet food is wonderful, sometimes you just want a hamburger and I had a great one at the barbecue, which is held on deck during each cruise. All of the passengers sit under the stars while the orchestra plays, the wine flows and the food sizzles. This smoothly-run event was one of the highlights of my voyage and a great opportunity to meet fellow guests.

My evenings aboard Silver Shadow were fairly tame. The *Jean Ann Ryan Production Company* put on a show each night after dinner and the shows

(ranging from Broadway tunes to a tumbling extravaganza) were surprisingly good considering the small size of the ship. The *Silver Shadow Orchestra*, consisting of all classically-trained Polish musicians, was top notch. Many passengers turned in after the shows, but those just getting started tried their luck at the small casino or listened to piano player Vincent Laurentis while having a nightcap in the bar.

Fellow Passengers

One of the most interesting things about my cruise was the number of repeat customers on board. I was definitely in the minority as a first-time Silversea passenger. So many of the people I talked to were back for their 3rd, 5th, 10th cruise and some said they had been on too many to count. And talking in terms of number of cruises is actually misleading. If someone combines cruising segments, he or she might be on board for a month or more. One woman from Florida spent a record 200 continuous days on a Silversea cruise.

“The Mediterranean has the color of macker

On the average cruise, 40% of the passengers are past guests. Once you sail on Silversea you are automatically enrolled in the *Venetian Society*, which is something of a frequent sailor program, offering discounts and special events to members who now number 80,000. An onboard staff member is dedicated to assisting Venetian Society members and helping them book their next cruises.

There was a nice mix of people on my cruise including older couples, honeymooners, a few young singles and large family groups. They are a sophisticated group; almost all of them seemed to be well-traveled and most had visited the Mediterranean before. The lack of a ship's photographer or midnight buffet was just fine with them. Silversea cruises average 65% North American passengers and 35% international guests. Although there is no children's program, my cruise included at least a dozen junior cruisers, all well-behaved.

Staff and Service

"I think that they have the best service and amenities of any cruise line. For consistently good service, they are tops," says Coffman. Silversea prides itself on having the best passenger-to-crew ratio of 1.31 to 1. The first night's gathering on the deck seemed like a reunion between staff and passengers who had sailed together before.

Silversea's staff members take their jobs very seriously and take a great deal of pride in keeping guests more than happy at all times. I found them to be friendly and enthusiastic, despite the long hours some of them work. The tour director and social hostess often seemed to be in two places at once, yet I never saw either

We could not have asked for anything more

without a smile. The hotel director and other staff members repeatedly came up to our table to make sure we were pleased with everything.

Silversea even puts a staff member on each and every shore excursion. He or she makes sure the tour is running smoothly and hands out water and hand wipes and even carries a backpack with first aid supplies. "I have never been on a cruise line where that was standard operating procedure," Coffman notes.

The last minutes of my journey on *Silver Shadow* reflect the excellent service I received throughout the cruise. Two staff members, wearing white gloves, took our luggage as we exited the ship. They carried it on the shuttle bus to the terminal and carried it off for us. Just then it began to rain and thunder. We needed a taxi and there were none to be found. While we waited under an awning, they arranged for us to

get a ride to the train station and stood out in the rain making sure everything went smoothly. We could not have asked for anything more.

Summer 2004

For the 2004 summer season, Silversea will have three of its ships sailing in the Mediterranean, with *Silver Shadow* tapped to sail in Alaska. Since 2004 marks Silversea's 10th anniversary, the company has numerous special events planned, particularly in Italy. Passengers who book 2004 cruises before the end of December can save up to 40% off the regular rates. For more information, call (800) 722-9955 or visit www.silversea.com ♦

—Kathy McCabe



el, changeable I mean." —Vincent Van Gogh

Philly's Tomato Base *continued from page 1*

Once in one camp, rarely are sides changed. Di Bruno's people do not sneak over to buy oil from Claudio's. Ever. (For that matter, market people do not buy from Reading Terminal, the city's other major food bazaar.) Nobody can really explain his loyalties. It's just a question of nurture. You are molded at a young age into a Claudio's/Tony Luke's/ Isgro's person, for instance. And there you remain.

Those people will forever trace the same path to the market, week to week, store to store, some homing device guiding them from the deer carcass that hangs by its heels outside of D'Angelo's to the salty cones of provolone dangling inside of Claudio's.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrip!

Sal Auriemma rips a large square of butcher's paper from the roll, climbing like the ascension of a zipper. He is the dry-witted owner of *Claudio Specialty Food*, the store his father started and one of the biggest money makers on the strip.

"What else, Mr. Fiorella?"

"Some *sopressata*," replies the owner of the neighboring sausage shop.



Saturdays the market is a riot of suburbanites who have driven hours for their week's supply of cheese and locals picking up a few last-minute items. Out on Ninth Street someone is blasting *Sinatra*. A crowd converges on Claudio's until the line of customers in front of the refrigerated cases runs three deep.

Before them is the best Italy has to offer: plump cut squid; pungent stuffed peppers; multiple generations of sharp cheddar; squat, fat sausages called *sopressata*. Behind them is an assortment of olives swimming in brine, imported dried pastas in hard-to-find shapes like *gnocchetti* and enough different bottles of oil and vinegar to form their own *genera*. The meat slicer hisses and another pound of *prosciutto* falls in a limp, pink huddle.

Sal and his crew wheel around one another to avoid collisions. The work area is on a raised platform, giving the air of pastors tending their flock. Communion is served. Claudio Auriemma passes around slices of rich white *pecorino* studded with salty truffles and there is a chorus of oohs.

"The culture here is all about relationships," said Senya D. Isayeff, one of those Italian wannabes who first came to Claudio's 14 years ago and has never strayed. Here you can walk up and get a taste. "When you get the munchies at 4, 5 in the morning, where else do you find this level of comfort food?" His find that day was shooters — plump cherry peppers stuffed with *prosciutto* and cheese.

The store opened in 1942 stocking fresh provolone and imported oils. Now Sal has his own vinegar bottled in *Modena*, a thick burgundy syrup that his staff slathers on everything.



"Pretty much what we sell we import — usually from the guy who made it," Sal says. There have been no worries about slowing sales. "When the economy's bad, people eat more!" he says brightly.

If appetites were the standard, then the Dow was positively underwater judging by the noshing at Di Bruno Bros.' new store, *Pronto*. It's a boutique place, selling cheese and prepared foods.

Tips for Visiting the Market

The Ninth Street market is along small, almost Old World streets, which makes for great atmosphere and lousy parking. Take a cab, or be prepared to troll for a place.

Go in the morning for a better selection and before the cramped streets and small shops get too ripe.

The market teems on

Saturdays, which means there's competition for the cannoli and prosciutto. But it's the circus that gives the place zest. Not all stores are open on Sunday, and those that are close by early afternoon. Weekday morning visits are especially delightful, as the vendors have time to educate you.



Most of the shops have Web sites and will ship their goods.

For more information, visit www.phillyitalianmarket.com

Market merchants don't like to create enemies, so they'll whisper in your ear that the best southern Italian cooking (outside their mothers' homes) is north of the market. *La Famiglia*

(8 S. Front Street.; (215) 922-2803) is one of the fanciest and priciest temples, but the food is sublime. Dinner for two, with all the courses, will easily run more than \$100, and reservations are crucial.



Bureaucracy: Italians make an average o

Felice Verrecchia sat on a stool, tackling an enormous pork sandwich. With each bite he lurched over his shirt to avoid splashing himself with oil or sauce. "I'm Italian, but I'm a Jew and God forbid I'm eating pork on the Sabbath," he says, wiping his lips. He claims to be a Di Bruno's guy from way back. "Claudio's is just bigger — that's all," he sniffs.

Across from Claudio's, Sonny D'Angelo's shop is churchlike. It's summer and meat demands have slackened. D'Angelo picks up a hairless rabbit. Four good whacks and the denuded creature is divvied up like a clover. On to the buffalo. One stroke and he cleaves a three-inch-thick steak from a side of meat the shade of persimmon. He is a hulking, bearded man with a medieval weapon. Hang out there too long and you start to think a lot about Freddy Krueger.

D'Angelo's grandfather started the store and the offspring have expanded his repertoire to include Japanese Kobe beef, a variety of game and, on occasion, such delicacies as yak and ostrich. His meaty sausage is chopped and stuffed at the store. A seasonal favorite is the French summer sausage, soaked in champagne, studded with apples.

D'Angelo can be monklike with strangers, but get him talking about Japanese beef and he is transformed into a man of passion. "It's different in the way it's raised," he says, his words punctuated by the thud of the cleaver. "The cows are raised in connection with people. [Whack!] They're given beer! They're content animals. [Whack!] When they're finished, it's top-notch prime."

The three shops serve as the crown of the market, near Christian Street. Farther down are more butchers, fishmongers, even a Middle Eastern empo-

rium. But keep walking and you'll notice many buildings are boarded up as owners retire and their offspring show no interest in hacking veal shanks six days a week. D'Angelo has taken it upon himself to stanch the decay by starting a Web site and promoting several cookbooks that he hopes will introduce the market to newer generations.

In doing so, he is counting on the lure of Italian food. But the future of Philly

cuisine might lie less than a mile south of Washington Street. There, in three separate strip malls, Chinese and Vietnamese families have opened mega-groceries, sprawling restaurants and quickie spots that ladle up beef soup called pho. Unlike the Italian Market, the stores are open seven days, morning until bedtime. In a few years, in true Philadelphia style, the pho and spring roll wars will doubtless begin. ♦

—Suzanne Sataline

The Power of Parm

Why are so many kitchens still plagued by that little green can of sawdust posing as *Parmigiano*? Is it

convenience? Only if you are physically unable to run a hunk of cheese across a grater a few times. Price? Yes, *Parmigiano* is more expensive. But the stuff in the can doesn't come cheap, either. Plus, when your *Parmigiano* is done, you're left with the wonderful rind -- but more on that later. Availability? This can be a problem in some areas. Look for cheese shops or Italian specialty stores.

The cheese sections in grocery stores often have wedges of Parmesan masquerading as the real stuff. This is the domestic version, shipped in from exotic locales like Wisconsin. As Italian food queen Lynne Rosetto Kasper writes: "American-made Parmesan is inedible. Never use it."

Like many gold-standard foods produced in Italy, *Parmigiano* production is governed by a consortium. The cheese can be produced only in the *zona tipica*, an area covering a handful of places including *Parma* and *Reggio Emilia*. Here, 270,000 cows soak up the environs and work their udders off to make enough milk to quench the *Parmigiano* demand. It takes 600 liters of milk to make one wheel of *Parmigiano*, which is aged for 18 to 24 months before being sold.

For some truly grate cheese, search out the true *Parmigiano*.

Parmigiano is not sliced into portions. Instead, the wheels are split with a special tool, which allows

the surface of the cheese to show off its crumbly texture. Most people think *Parmigiano* is only for grating. In fact, Italians are more likely to eat chunks of the cheese as *antipasto*, sometimes soaked with fine balsamic vinegar.

Buy only as much *Parmigiano* as you will use in a month, and keep it refrigerated and sealed in plastic.

Don't save it for a special occasion. It loses flavor every day that it stays in your fridge.

And don't be fooled by imitations. Discerning real *Parmigiano* is as easy as a glance at the rind. The consortium brands all of its wheels with a series of tiny dots that spell out *parmigiano-reggiano*, along with the production date.

Now, back to the rind. When you've finished a piece of *Parmigiano* and are left with only the yellow edge, don't throw it away. Drop it into a pot of simmering soup and let it work its magic. The rind, which is really just hardened cheese, imparts a rich and mellow flavor that can push an ordinary soup to the gold standard.

—Rob Byers and Tara Tuckwiller

Rome's Heavenly

Rome is a city of mind-boggling contrasts, a place like no other in the world. In the Eterna, the ancient past meets the highly-styled present, pagan emperors prefigure popes, Baroque monuments become the runway for *haute couture*, and sometimes, heaven meets hell. If you're the kind of traveler who delights in Rome's textures and complexities, then take note of four new hotels that offer you a chance to step out of your earthly world to experience the eternal delights of Rome. All four hotels affirm that the Eterna is a vital and contemporary city, while simultaneously celebrating the city's star-studded past.

Boscolo Aleph Hotel

If Rome's connection to the eternal is what attracts you to the city, head straight for the new Aleph hotel near Piazza Barberini and the Via Veneto.

With interiors designed by Adam Tihany, who also did

Le Cirque in New York City, the brand-new Aleph provides the sin-tillating (but luxurious) opportunity to retrace Dante's fantastic voyage from hell to heaven. *Hell*—the

hotel lobby and bar—is an inferno of reds. The deluxe décor suggests that Dante has redecorated and that his designer has an eye for luxury and a

startlingly good sense of humor. But, heaven can't wait. The spa in the lower level of the hotel reunites body and soul after a long flight. The 96 rooms of the Aleph provide respite from the stimulations and temptations of Rome.

They're ultra-mod and sleek, decorated



Aleph Hotel Bar

with huge black and white photos of Rome's past and present. To relax mind and body after a day of sightseeing, you can choose the *Terrazza Rooftop Bar*, which showcases the cityscape of domes

pointing toward the skies, or enjoy the *Library Bar*, wittily painted with *trompe l'oeil* books. Your every desire can be fulfilled at the hotel's lush restaurant,

SIN, where the creative cuisine offers a distinctly Roman interpretation of "soul food" with a menu that changes daily.

es hotel

Heaven may be governed by the pleasure principle. If so, you can find out what the afterlife will feel like with a stay at the new es hotel. The name, es, refers both to the hotel's unusual location, on Rome's Esquiline Hill, and to the German word for Freud's *id*, that eternally desirous part of our unconscious. But it doesn't take a psychoanalyst to discover why this super-designed hotel has been a hit. The sleek lobby seems a summary of Rome's history, ancient past to high-style present. It showcases an archaeological site discovered while the hotel was in construction, and is furnished with glowing desk pods, from which the stylish staff meet and greet hotel guests. The more-than-comfortable rooms, white and wood in their tones, comfort both the conscious and the unconscious mind. Beds are showcased at the center of the room and your efforts to relax are aided by plasma screen TVs, DVD players, and high speed Internet connections. Despite its simple beauty, your room may not be your favorite part of the es. On the seventh floor of the hotel, you can take your *id* for a dip in the rooftop pool or otherwise drench your ego with spirits from the bar, *Zest*, which offers an unbelievably chic view across the mass

THE DETAILS



ALEPH HOTEL
Via di San Basilio, 15
(39) 06 422-901
www.aleph.boscolohotels.com/index.shtml

Rates: Double rooms from 372 euros per night.

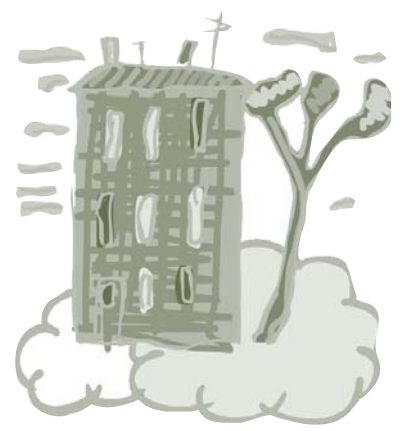
ES HOTEL
Via Turati 71
(39) 06 444-841
www.eshotel.it
Rates: Double rooms from 380 euros per night.

HOTEL EXEDRA
Piazza della Repubblica 47
(39) 06 489-381
www.exedra.boscolohotels.com
Rates: Double rooms from 400 euros per night.

RIPA SUITES HOTEL
Via degli Orti di Trastevere 3
(39) 06 58-611
www.ripahotel.com
Rates: Until November 30th, double rooms start at 185 euros, including breakfast. Through December 21st, the "I Love Shopping" package offers two nights in a double room, buffet breakfast and a shopping assistant for 430 euros.

Rome has 74,968 hotel beds. An average of

New Hotels



of train tracks that enter Rome's *Termini Station*.

Don't forego a dinner at the hotel restaurant, *Sette*, which has become one of the hippest eateries in town. They offer creative versions of Italian standards, and in

fine weather, you can eat at tables artfully placed around the drop-dead gorgeous pool.



Pool at hotel es

offer a glimpse of the archaeology below. But the parallels with the ancient past don't stop there. The rooftop of the Exedra will have a fabulous pool and spa (opening in the next few months—the hotel

is just receiving its finishing touches now) that will provide infinite earthly delights. And since ancient Roman bathers weren't just concerned with the outward appearance of their body, but also spent their bath time eating, socializing, and even feeding their minds, the Exedra offers guests the same opportunities. It's slated to have three restaurants. One, *La Frusta*, which pays homage to Rome's past with black and white photos, is already open on the hotel's mezzanine floor. Two other restaurants are projected, among which will be one called *Godzilla*, serving up

Japanese food and a monstrous view across the city's skyline.

Ripa Suites Hotel

One of the great lessons of Rome is how

elements of the past can be transformed and revitalized. If Romans had adopted the modern policy of starting with a clean slate in order to build, then we would be without *Piazza Navona*, the *Pantheon*, the *Roman Forum*, and innumerable other sites that attest to Rome's 3000-year history. Instead, Romans love to adapt and reuse places and spaces, and the latest and greatest

example of the Roman retro-fit can be found in the Ripa Hotel, creatively installed in an unlikely modern office building in *Trastevere*, the neighborhood across the *Tiber* where residents claim to be the only true Romans. Enter this hotel and you'll find yourself in a modern and minimalistic lobby designed by architects Jeremy King and Riccardo Roselli

(who also designed the *es* hotel), and filled with geo-modern furniture with a nod to the 70s. Rooms are creatively put together and are *molto moderno*. Among the delights are high-design beds, televisions mounted on chaise lounges, minibars that double as art installa-

tions, and carpet with a pattern of gray pebbles that seems a cushioned-version of Rome's basalt-paved streets. It's the whole experience of the Ripa that woos: a Pilates trainer is available for those who need to relax after a hard day of chasing history, and even better, the restaurant, *Riparte*, offers an excellent pan-Mediterranean menu and doubles as an exhibition space and sushi bar. And for those looking to be part of the hippest scene in town, the adjacent discobar, *Suite*, is a psychedelic paradise (www.thesoundsosuite.com). ♦

— Laura Flusche and Susan Sanders

Laura Flusche and Susan Sanders live in Rome where they run the Institute of Design and Culture, which offers Urban Iconography City Courses (www.urban-iconography.org).

Hotel Exedra

The brand-new Hotel Exedra, in *Piazza della Repubblica*, would make Roman Emperors weep with envy. The Emperor *Diocletian*, in particular, would love to see this pleasure palace, as it stands on the site of the public bath building that he constructed to soothe the minds and bodies of his ancient subjects. It would be appropriate to say that ultra-luxe Hotel Exedra serves the same purpose today. The elegant and imperial curve of the hotel's entry traces the perimeter of a semi-circular terrace from which ancient bathers could see across the Eternal City. Now, users of the semi-circular space are offered more than just views, for the hotel's elegant Champagnerie and bar, *Tazio*, named for a *paparazzo* of the



Exedra Hotel

1950s who served time as Sophia Loren's personal photographer, spills out onto the travertine terrace. This is *la dolce vita* updated. As befits the hotel's imperial site, the interior is stunning. Marble and silk are pervasive and tasteful lighting makes these materials blush. The rooms are large, classically decorated, and lavish. In the basement, glass panels in the floor

f 20 million people visit the city each year.

News, Tips, Deals



READ ITALY: Editor's Picks for Fall

This fall, not only do we have Italy in the movie theaters (the movie *Under the Tuscan Sun* will be released at the end of September), but also in large numbers on the bookshelves. The popularity of Italy-themed books, from guides to analysis of current events, is just another example of how many of us just can't get enough of this fascinating culture.

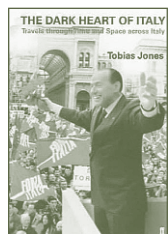
Whether or not you are traveling to Italy this fall, here are some of my selections to make your trip or your armchair reading more interesting:



Italy is so rich with opportunities to explore religious history, but it's often hard to put all that you see in context. That's why I like *The Pilgrim's Italy: A Travel Guide to the Saints* (Inner Travel Books, \$17.95) so much. Authors James and Colleen Heater, longtime yoga and meditation teachers, divide the book by regions and highlight the cities that are home to the saints as well as their shrines. Each entry contains a detailed biography of the saint as well as practical information on visiting places of interest. This book will appeal equally to the merely curious as well as the hard core pilgrim. The entry on the *Padre Pio* (who was canonized in 2002) shrine in *San Giovanni Rotondo* (Puglia) is particularly noteworthy.

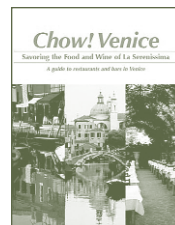
The Dark Heart of Italy: Travels Through Time and Space Across Italy (Faber and Faber) by British journalist Tobias Jones

is a selection of 10 essays exploring everything from domestic terrorism to the circus-nature of Italian television programming. Jones, who has lived in Italy for four years, is at his most compelling when writing about Italian Prime Minister *Silvio Berlusconi*, the businessman turned politician whose power and enormous conflicts of interest continue



to grow unchecked. "If you watch football matches, or television, try to buy a house or a book or a newspaper, rent a video, or else simply shop in a supermarket, the chances are you're somehow filling the coffers of *Il Cavaliere*," he writes. While some of his essays are stronger than others (I will admit to skipping a few pages) Jones should be commended for trying to find the real Italy, no matter how much darker or conflicted it may be from what we imagine.

Visitors to Venice often lament the difficulty in finding a truly outstanding meal in this city catering to tourists. Whether or not that's true, there's no excuse now for missing out on Venice's restaurant and bar scene with the publication of *Chow! Venice: Savoring the Food and Wine of La Serenissima* (The Wine Appreciation Guild, \$14.95) by Shannon Essa and Ruth Edenbaum. The authors unveil their favorite Venetian haunts from hole-in-wall wine bars to world-renowned restaurants. The directions to each eatery are indispensable in this city of maze-like streets. I used this book on a recent trip to Venice and found it indispensable. (See one of the restaurants I visited on page 12.)

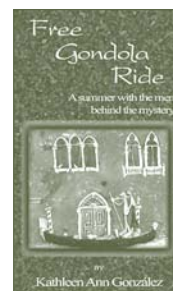


Fashionistas listen up, help is on the way. Whether you are looking for a great pair of calf-skin gloves (try *Sermoneta* in Rome) or an unusual wedding dress (*Domo Adami* in Milan), if you can wear it, you will find it in *Where to Wear, Italy 2003 Edition* (Fairchild & Gallagher, \$12.95). This shopping guide focuses on clothing



and accessories stores in Rome, Florence and Milan. While the authors concentrate mainly on the outposts of well-known Italian designers, they do manage to sprinkle in a selection of small boutiques and the showrooms of up and coming designers. They also tell you the best places to grab lunch or get a spa treatment in all three cities.

Free Gondola Ride by Kathleen Ann Gonzalez caught my eye as I was perusing the English language section of a Venice bookstore. A young teacher/writer chronicles a summer getting to know a mysterious group of men — the *gondoliers* of Venice. While Gonzalez often focuses a bit too much on the *gondoliers'* many attempts to seduce her, she still manages to share fascinating insights on one of the most insular communities in Italy. This self-published book can be ordered from the Web site www.freegondolaride.com ♦



—Kathy McCabe



Emilia-Romagna is the wealthie

and Events



Get in on the Secret

For something a bit different on your next visit to Venice, try the Secret Itineraries Tour at the *Palazzo Ducale* (Doge's Palace). The 90-minute tour reveals places of intrigue not open to the general public. This includes the private working rooms of the Doge and the *stanza dell'Inquisizione* (State Inquisitors' Room) as well as the *sala dei Tre Capi* where the *Consiglio dei Dieci* met. There's the Piombi Prison (see Casanova's jail cell) and the maze-like passages leading to the *camera del tormento*, the torture chamber where prisoners were hung by their wrists. Tours in English are limited to 20 people and are offered at 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.



daily except Wednesday. The ticket price of 12.50 euros includes admission to the general areas of the palace. Call well in advance for reservations: (39) 041-520-9070.

Don't Bother Visiting... Rome Edition

An occasional feature to help you save precious time and money in Italy.

Porta Portese: If you like crowds, you will love this market. If you like buying junk, this is the place for you. Get my drift? The over-rated market at Porta Portese might only be worth a visit if you are looking for some cheap household items for a long stay in Rome.

The National Pasta Museum: I love pasta. I really love pasta, so I was willing to fork over nine euros to learn something about



my lifelong love. What a disappointment! First of all, the museum staff could not have been less friendly. I learned a few intriguing factoids from the audio guide, but save for a few interesting early 20th century pasta machines, the displays were lame. By the end of the tour, I was starving and the museum could have really gained back my respect if they had some samples of fresh pasta. Alas, no such luck.

Noteworthy Travels

Two Italian-Americans, Linda Mironti and Michael Mele, created *Il Chiostro* (meaning "the cloister") in order to give friends and family an interesting place to work in Italy on their art and discover Italian culture.

For eight years, *Il Chiostro* has offered painting, fiction writing, photography, singing, acting, cooking, hiking and yoga programs in various locations around the country. Their 2003 season isn't over yet.

From October 26 to November 6, 2003, 40 participants will follow one of three courses of study — photography, watercolor painting or cooking — while staying at the Dievole Chianti Winery in Tuscany as part of *Il Chiostro's Autumn Arts Festival*. Each day, the entire group will come together daily for meals, Italian language classes, opera lectures, wine tasting and other events and then break off for their special interest classes. The 10-day program costs \$1,950 per person based on double occupancy. The price includes two meals a day and various extras, but does not include airfare. For more information, call (800) 990-3506 or visit www.ilchiostro.com

Sometimes women just want a girls-only getaway. They might be single, their husbands don't like to travel or they just feel it's great to see the world with other women. The *Women's Travel Club* fills this need with tours worldwide "designed by women for

women." This fall the company offers a trip covering the highlights of Southern Italy. *From Sicily to Sorrento* runs November 5 to 16, 2003 and includes visits to Palermo, Cefalu, Agrigento, Siracusa, Taormina and Pompeii which stays in 4-star hotels. Tours usually run with 15 to 20 participants who range in age from 30 to 65. The cost of the tour is \$2,850 based on double occupancy, including airfare. For more information, call (800) 480-4448 or visit www.womenstravelclub.com

Parla italiano? If your answer is no, then a residential language program might be just the ticket for your next trip to Italy. Unless they take place in one of Italy's big cities, most of these language programs are seasonal. *Omnilingua* based in San Remo, on the Italian Riviera, is one exception, offering affordable classes year-round. All of the instructors are native Italian speakers and are required to speak English as well as another language. A standard course of instruction four hours a day for two weeks costs 270 euros; six hours a day (intensive) is 415 euros for the same duration. *Omnilingua* offers many housing options from half-board with an Italian host family (starts at 435 euros for two weeks) to a single room in a local hotel (50 euros per night). The school has classes scheduled for October, November and December. For more information, call (39) 0184 599-828 visit www.omnilingua.net

1 euro = \$1.10 at press time

st region in Italy.

Three *Great* Casual City Restaurants

FLORENCE

La Giostra



When more than one Italian tells you to try La Giostra, you know it will be something special. Located near the

Duomo, the restaurant, which means “carousel” in Italian, serves up an enchanting atmosphere, sumptuous food and even a real prince. *Principe* (officially *Prince Dimitri Kunz d'Asburgo Lorena*), as the owner is affectionately known, takes his place at center stage of the restaurant assisted by his three children. He dresses in a white chef's hat and jacket and enthusiastically plies his customers with complimentary spumante and antipasti. With his vast knowledge and excellent English, the prince is the perfect resource for questions about the history and sites of Florence. He will happily share tales while decanting your wine. His half-Hapsburg heritage influences the menu with selections such as wiener schnitzel and a highly-lauded sacher torte mixed in with perfectly executed Tuscan dishes. Entrees run 12 to 23 euros. Lit by candlelight and twinkling Christmas lights, La Giostra exudes romance save for the hustle and bustle of the waitstaff rushing about the small space on a busy night.

Try: Steak with Parmesan and rucola; ravioli stuffed with pears and pecorino; taglierini with white truffles; sacher imperiale or tiramisù for dessert.

Best for: A romantic evening.

Reservations: Highly recommended.

Open: Every evening for dinner; Monday – Friday for lunch.

Details:

Borgo Pinti, 10R
(39) 055 24-13-41

www.ristorantelagiostra.com

ROME

'Gusto

'Gusto would be at home in almost any world capital. The black and white paint, light-colored wood and rattan chairs are staples of urban chic. Part restaurant, part pizzeria, part wine bar and part cooking supply store, 'Gusto offers something for everyone and that's precisely its attraction. The downstairs pizzeria is especially popular with Rome's young hipsters. The upstairs restaurant offers Italian classics with a twist as well as couscous



and dishes prepared in a wok, which can be a nice change for those tired of pizza and pasta. The eclectic entrees, such as loin of lamb and fried rabbit

chops, cost an average of 18 euros.

Couscous and wok selections run about 11 euros. 'Gusto offers ample outside seating covered by an awning.

Try: Wine from the ample list of offerings; pizza; couscous with vegetables; chocolate mousse with orange sauce.

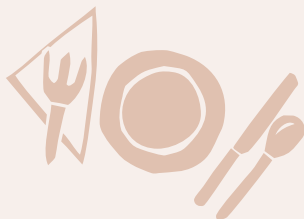
Best for: A casual, yet chic night out.

Reservations: Recommended, especially for the restaurant.

Open: Daily: *Restaurant* 1 – 3 p.m., 8 p.m.-midnight; *Pizzeria* 12:30 – 3 p.m., 7:30 p.m. – 1 a.m.; *Wine bar* 11 a.m. – 2 a.m.

Details:

Piazza Augusto Imperatore, 9
(39) 06 322-6273



VENICE

Vino Vino

As you enter *Vino Vino*, take note of the number of men wearing black and white striped shirts and red neck scarves. Indeed, this tiny wine bar is



incredibly popular with Venice's *gondoliers*. Diners order off the menu of daily

specials at the bar. There are usually a variety of meat, chicken, vegetable and pasta dishes; some examples: pasta salad, spicy veal stew, turkey with zucchini and curry. Entrees are 9 euros. All of the dishes are prepared at *Vino Vino*'s sister restaurant, the much more expensive *Antico Martini* next door. Once you place your order and sit down, the service is fast, but certainly could be friendlier. The food more than makes up for it though. Avoid *Vino Vino* between noon and 2 p.m. when it is crowded for lunch. Visit the restaurant's Web site for a 10% discount coupon.

Try: “The lasagna always stands out,” say the authors of the restaurant guide *Chow! Venice* (see page 10 for book review).

Best for: An informal meal at odd hours.

Reservations: Not accepted.

Open: Wednesday – Monday, 10:30 a.m. – midnight.

Details:

Calle delle Veste 2007A
(39) 041 241-7688
www.anticomartini.com/vinovino.htm

1 euro = \$1.10 at press time

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