



Kathy McCabe and Frances Mayes at Bramasole

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SPECIAL REPORT: CORTONA

DREAM OF ITALY®

Dream Of PUBLICATION

Volume 18, Issue 6

www.dreamofitaly.com

August 2019



PEOPLE TO KNOW In Cortona



Cortona is an ancient Tuscan town, steeped in Etruscan history.

Built into a hillside, it commands a breathtaking view of the *Val di Chiana* below.

Cortona's history dates back at least 3,000 years, but it was most recently made famous by *Frances Mayes'* book and movie, *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

Those works introduced the city to new generations, who now travel from around the world to experience Cortona firsthand. *Dream of Italy* founder and host Kathy McCabe traveled to Cortona to meet Frances and her husband, Ed, for the new *Dream of Italy: Tuscan Sun Special* now



Villa Bramasole

airing on PBS stations across the United States.

Cortona has "an intense sense of community," Frances tells Kathy in the show. She encourages newcomers to learn the town by exploring it — by hiking the Roman trails on the hillside, visiting the market every Saturday in *Piazza Signorelli* or having *aperitivo* in *Piazza della*

Repubblica. "Inevitably," she says, "you meet people."

Here is a walk through Cortona, through the eyes of six locals whose passion for their town is infectious.

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Il Falconiere

Cortona RESTAURANTS

"We are so lucky," Frances Mayes says on the *Dream of Italy Podcast*. "In the walls of the town, there's a restaurant every time you look, and you can't go wrong. They're all wonderful." In how many places can you say the restaurants are all good?

Most chefs in Cortona are dedicated to showcasing the region's traditional recipes with locally sourced ingredients, so expect lots of *Chianina* beef, *Cinta Senese* pork, *porcini* mushrooms, *Pecorino* cheese, truffles and homemade olive oil. Be sure to try *pici*, a thick, hand-rolled pasta that looks like fat *spaghetti*, or *cinghiale*, the wild boar that roam the area and are used to make *ragu* that you'll find on *pappardelle* or *tagliatelle*.

Now, on to where to eat:

Movie-Famous TERRACE RESTAURANT

For dinner in the heart of town, *Ristorante La Loggetta* commands one of the best views of town — over the piazza. This restaurant features *al fresco* dining on the 13th-century terrace overlooking *Piazza della Repubblica* made famous in the movie *Under the Tuscan Sun* — where Diane Lane's character sits to write postcards, using Frances Mayes' observation from her book that the

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Cortona overlooks the *Val di Chiana*.

IVAN Botanici

One of the best ways to enter Cortona is from *Piazza Garibaldi*, the busy plaza that's a drop-off spot for taxis and buses. From this panoramic vantage point, you can gaze out at the valley, with the extinct volcano of *Mount Amiata* and the waters of *Lake Trasimeno* in the distance, where Hannibal defeated the Romans in 217 BC.

As you head into town, you'll be on the main street, *Via Nazionale*. Known by locals as *rugapiana* — or, flat street — it's the only level thoroughfare in town.

Strolling along, you'll get a feel for Cortona's charming restaurants and shops featuring local pottery, artisan jewelry, and wool and linen clothing. Among those is *Il Pozzo* — or "the well" — a quintessentially Cortonese shop featuring original art and photos that's run by *Ivan Botanici*, along with his wife, *Loriana*, and their children, *Thomas* and *Marta*.

Upstairs, the shop is a classic Italian *tabacchi* store open from 8 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Ivan makes an appearance in Frances' book, as a character named *Niccolo*, a shopkeeper sweeping the street in front of his store.

Downstairs, it becomes a gallery — open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. — with paintings and photos alongside gifts such as leather journals, handmade papers and original jewelry. This is where you'll find the shop's namesake, an Etruscan well that dates to 400 BC, which Ivan discovered and restored when he was expanding the store.

Ivan grew up here, in the hometown of renowned artists such as *Luca Signorelli*, *Pietro Berrettini* and *Gino Severini*, the famed futurist with whom Botanici's

great-grandfather, also a painter, shared a longtime friendship.

Echoing Frances' advice, Ivan says the best way to appreciate Cortona is to engage with people. "You must try to meet people in order to become friends because it is the friendship which creates a memento, which creates a



Ivan Botanici and daughter Marta

beautiful moment in your life," he explains. "And that is the experience that everybody's looking for."

He urges visitors to view the town "with the eye of a child" by exploring its streets and alleys. He also recommends venturing to *Le Celle*, the monastery where St. Francis once stayed; to *Bramasole*, the house Frances chronicled in *Under the Tuscan Sun*; or to the *Basilica of Santa Margherita*, where the mummified body of the town's patron saint rests.

The key to understanding why Cortona has long been a destination favored by noble and artistic travelers, explains Ivan, is getting to know the locals and attending events such as the annual *Archidado*, in which he plays a central character to celebrate the city's medieval history.

"We have a beautiful background, and you have the feeling when you are in this the town that there is a beautiful aura," he says. "That's why Cortona must be lived."

To learn more about Ivan and Cortona art, visit www.cortonagiftshop.com

MARCO Molesini

Continuing along *Via Nazionale* leads to *Piazza della Repubblica*, the vibrant heart of Cortona. It's framed by the massive stairs of the 12th-century *Palazzo del Comune* on one side and the 13th-century *Loggia della Pescheria* on the other side.

Frances has called this piazza "the living room of Cortona." This is where old men gather on wooden benches to watch the square fill with tables populated by locals and visitors enjoying cappuccino in the morning, lunch at midday or aperitivo in the evening.



Marco Molesini

And it's here you'll find a pair of shops run by the *Molesini* family, whose patriarch came to Cortona in 1937, opening a grocery store and a bakery. Today, *Giuliano* and *Antonietta Molesini* run a small grocery store — *Molesini Market* — that sits directly below the loggia. It's open from 7 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 4:30 to 8 p.m.

On the opposite side of the square sits the family's renowned wine shop — *Enoteca Molesini* — managed by their sons, *Marco* and *Paolo Molesini*. It's open from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 3 to 8 p.m.

Marco became a sommelier in 1999, and the wine shop opened the following year. Its growth has paralleled Cortona's rise as a wine

Originally an Umbrian city, *Cortona*

region, and it now stocks more than 1,500 labels from across Italy, all of which can be shipped worldwide.

If you're not familiar with Cortona Syrah, Marco and Paolo will happily pour you a glass of introduction. Wine tastings are available every day in the shop and every Thursday night from May through October as part of the Wine, Dine and Shine. For more than 20 years, the wine shop has partnered with *DelBrenna Jewelry* and local restaurants to host these weekly dinners in what has become a Cortona tradition. For more information, visit www.winedineshine.com

Marco can explain all things wine related, but he's particularly enthusiastic about the history of Syrah. There are 35 wine producers in the region, resulting in about 1 million bottles every year — 85 percent of which is exported.

With its rich history and culture, Cortona has been a destination for travelers for centuries, says Marco. "But now Cortona is becoming more and more known for its wine."

To meet Marco and learn more about Cortona wines, visit www.molesini-market.com

SEBASTIAN *DelBrenna*

Nearby in *Piazza della Repubblica*, tucked under the ancient stairs of the town hall, is a tiny jewel box of a boutique, where a Cortonese craftsman and his American wife marry their skill at jewelry making with their affection for Cortona.

Sebastian DelBrenna embodies exuberance, for his hometown and his

craft. There's no mistaking his devotion as he talks about Cortona in the sumptuous DelBrenna Jewelry showroom, which is located near the original shop inside an olive mill that dates to the 1300s.

"What makes Cortona special is the people," he says. "In fact, Frances Mayes said, 'I came for the beauty, but I stayed for the people.'"



Sebastian and Megan DelBrenna

Sebastian grew up in Cortona, the third generation of his family to learn the art of jewelry making. His grandfather taught skills honed in Florence to his father, who passed it on to Sebastian and his twin brother, *Alessandro*.

Today, Sebastian and his Kansas-born wife, Megan, run the business.

For a shopping experience unlike any other, visit the DelBrenna showroom, where handmade jewelry is displayed in a historic setting. It all reflects the signature chain designs, which in turn represent the family links behind the business. Those same chain designs also can be found adorning DelBrenna's handmade shoes.

Sebastian tends to be the life of any party he attends. He'll explain the olive mill's history and the jewelry making process with the same effervescence as the *prosecco* he'll offer, sprinkled with gold and silver flakes.

On Thursdays from May through October, DelBrenna puts the shine in the town's Wine, Dine and Shine festivities, allowing participants to borrow jewelry to wear to the dinners that are part of the event. The shop is open Monday through Saturday from

11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (8 p.m. on Thursdays) and by appointment on Sundays.

In 2018, the couple followed a yellow brick road back to Kansas, where Megan hails from, when they opened a U.S. location in Kansas City. But they still spend most of their time in Cortona.

All of the shop décor and the jewelry designs reflect the Etruscan history and artistic traditions of Cortona. Sebastian proudly points out the city is known as "the mother of Troy and the grandmother of Rome" because of legends surrounding the city's founding by descendants of Noah centuries before their subsequent descendants founded Troy and Rome.

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DREAM OF ITALY®

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Dream of Italy, the subscription travel newsletter covering Italian travel and culture, is published 10 times a year. Delivery by mail is \$87 in the U.S., Canada and abroad. A digital subscription (downloadable PDFs) costs \$77 per year. Subscriptions include online access to more than 170 back issues and regular e-mail updates.

Three ways to subscribe:

1. Send a check to *Dream of Italy*, P.O. Box 2025, Denver, CO 80201
2. Call 202-297-3708
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was conquered by Etruscans.

To learn more about Sebastian and the art of jewelry making, visit www.delbrennajewelry.com

EMILIANO Rossi

Many Tuscan cooks — in their homes and their restaurants — are passionately committed to slow food that highlights local, seasonal cuisine, not so much because it's a movement of the moment, but because it's a way of life.

Chef *Emiliano Rossi* of *Osteria del Teatro* — just north of *Piazza della Repubblica* — embodies that spirit with a theatrical flair. He encourages diners to linger over meals he's painstakingly researched and prepared to honor Tuscan traditions, while adding his



GUEST EDITOR

Lane Fullerton Lemons

Jane Fullerton Lemons is an award-winning journalist who has covered Washington from the White House to Congress for more than 25 years, documenting the people behind the politics. A serendipitous friendship introduced her to Cortona, where she helped coordinate tours of Tuscany while completing work on her master's degree in creative nonfiction. She is currently putting her passion for Cortona's people, history and culture into a forthcoming guidebook, *Soaking Up the Tuscan Sun: The Insider's Guide to Cortona*. You can follow her adventures in traveling and writing @janefullertonlemons on Instagram and @lemonsjane on Twitter.

own signature to each dish.

"I want to give people the original, the flavor of Tuscany," he explains. "When you eat here, you will remember that it's authentic."

If Cortona represents a crossroads, where Roman roads once converged, Emiliano has created a restaurant that sits at the intersection of food and theater and music, bringing a modern interpretation to timeless Tuscan dishes — quite literally, a feast for all the senses.

"My kitchen is about paying proper attention to the territory," he says, standing in one of three dining rooms with different themes. "It's a collaboration of the past and the present."

The restaurant is situated in a 6th-century building that housed a police station some 1,500 years ago. Emiliano's father, an architect, restored the building, leaving the original floor and stairs as well as the massive doorway constructed from a single hunk of ancient timber. The result is a stage where the history of Tuscany plays out on each plate.

The family's stamp is everywhere: Photos of famous guests fill the walls, and original theater posters hang above the fireplaces. The ladies' room houses the dolls collected by Emiliano's wife, *Ylenia*, who also heads the waitstaff.

For his restaurant's 25th anniversary in 2019, Emiliano created seven dishes that represent his rendition of traditional Tuscan recipes. Each is designed to tell a story, accompanied by a photograph that represents it. His cinematic style can be seen in the videos on the restaurant's website.

As Emiliano explains each dish his passion is unmistakable. He wants each diner to experience the pleasure of the table — *il piacere della tavola* — lingering over each course, chatting with the waiter, listening to the music.

For Emiliano, food is an art form; the ingredients are the paint he uses to color the blank canvas of the plate. His recipes represent his commitment to maintaining his Tuscan heritage and sharing it with others.



Chef Emiliano Rossi

"For me, the kitchen is the history and the culture," he says. "You must taste the history. You must taste Tuscany."

To meet Emiliano and view his menus, visit www.osteria-del-teatro.it

SILVIA Baracchi

Silvia Baracchi makes cooking look deceptively easy.

The Michelin-starred chef regularly holds cooking classes in a modest space designed to look like a home kitchen punctuated by a cherry red stove, copper pots and brick floor. Guests at *Il Falconiere* — the *Relais & Chateaux* hotel and restaurant she and her husband, *Ricardo*, own just outside Cortona — gather around a simple wooden table to watch and learn.

With the goal of transforming the way her students think about approaching food, Silvia focuses on dishes they could actually make back home.

Cortona is 70 miles south

Mounds of zucchini flowers are trimmed and stuffed with a *mozzarella* mixture. Dough is mixed and kneaded for hand-rolled *pici* pasta. Tomatoes and strawberries are stemmed and chopped, headed for pasta sauce and *panna cotta*.

During the class, a large brown Boxer strolls nonchalantly through the open door into what is clearly familiar territory. *Giacco*, the resident mascot, sniffs his way around the room before settling in for a nap.



Silvia Baracchi

Through it all, the world-class chef chats, in English and Italian, patiently helping students knead the pasta dough or master their chopping skills. *Executive Chef Richard Titi* works with Silvia, and they make the classes fun, quipping that wine will be served once the knives have been put away.

The cooking classes are only one element of the hospitality available at Il Falconiere — Ricardo's family home, which is celebrating its 30th year in 2019. The ancient *limonaia* that once housed lemon trees for the winter now houses the restaurant where Silvia offers up stunning interpretations of classic Tuscan dishes.

While Silvia oversees the kitchen, Ricardo and the couple's son, *Benedetto*, have turned their attention to *Baracchi Winery*, continuing the family tradition of grape-growing that began in 1860. With 30 hectares of vineyards, they produce grapes that include the Syrah and *Sangiovese* typical of the region. The winery's signature is the award-winning Brut Rosé, named among the best sparkling wines in the world.

Those vines frame the property, which

has a stunning view of nearby Cortona on the hillside. Walking along a pathway, Silvia points out virtually every bush or flower or tree along the way — from the basil to the rosemary to the elderberry — all of which are destined to find their way onto a plate.

When it comes to cooking, explains the chef, "The most important ingredient is your fantasy."

To learn more about Silvia and the Baracchi properties, visit www.ilfalconiere.it

VITTORIO Camorri

When it comes to showcasing regional food and wine, *Vittorio Camorri* has become a one-man Chamber of Commerce for Cortona in particular and Tuscany in general.

Vittorio grew up in Cortona, and now operates an *agriturismo* in what was once his family's 17th-century farmhouse, at the foot of Cortona's hillside in the tiny hamlet of *Montalla*.

Through his company, *Terretrusche* — meaning "land of Etruscans" — he organizes events and offers rental properties. The events he plans offer spectacular renditions of local food and wine, with specific focus on Syrah wines and *Chianina* beef.

With an emphasis on slow food that's produced locally Vittorio is particularly fond of Chianina beef cattle. One of the largest and oldest

breeds in the world, they originated in the region's *Val di Chiana*, where they've been raised for at least 2,220 years. Historically, they were draft animals, but now are raised for their meat — which is used to make the famous *bistecca alla fiorentina*.

Vittorio's signature event is the annual Chianina and Syrah festival, which brings together renowned chefs from Cortona restaurants and throughout Italy, including Silvia Baracchi and other Michelin-starred chefs. For more information on the event, visit www.chianinaesyrah.com.

Though he organizes numerous events, Vittorio's heart remains at *I Pagliai*, the agriturismo he restored and runs with his wife, *Stefania*, and other family members. His mother, *Maura*, bakes the cakes served at breakfast — literally, the *torta della nonna* (the recipe was in the June/July 2019 issue of *Dream of Italy*). His son, *Tobia*, tends the garden that provides vegetables for dinner and sometimes drives the tractor harvesting the 25 hectares of wheat and sunflower fields. The cozy dining room features old photos of haystacks on the property, for which it's named.



Vittorio Camorri

For Vittorio, the point of all these events is to bring people together to highlight the best of Cortona and Tuscany.

"At I Pagliai, you never grow old," he says. "We want you to experience traditions, comfort, family and typical flavors — the Italian good living."

To meet Vittorio and learn about his events, visit www.terretrusche.com

east of the city of Florence.

grapes are so luscious they “even smell purple.” Frances and Ed frequent the restaurant, where they ate during the *Dream of Italy: Tuscan Sun Special*.



Frances Mayes with her husband, Ed, and Kathy McCabe

While the restaurant draws tourists who come for its connection to the movie, its menu and its ambiance remain decidedly authentic. *Chef Marco Frivoli* and his wife, *Lara*, offer typical Tuscan meat and pasta dishes, such as *Chianina tagliata*, wild boar *pappardelle* and pasta *carbonara*, but with Marco’s personal touch.



Ristorante La Loggetta

The moderately priced menu regularly features seafood such as shrimp or scallops. The cheese fondue appetizer topped with shaved truffle is a unique way to enjoy local cheeses. The homemade desserts include a melt-in-your-mouth molten chocolate cake.

Ristorante La Loggetta

Piazza di Pescheria
(39) 0575 630575
www.laloggetta.com

Open Thursday to Tuesday for lunch and dinner.
Closed Wednesday.

Classic
CORTONA TRATTORIA

For a classic casual *trattoria*, a favorite spot for locals and visitors alike is *Trattoria Dardano*. The name stems from the legend — as told by the ancient poet Virgil — that Cortona was founded by the mythical Dardanus. A regular stop for visiting celebrities, the recently expanded dining area features photos that trace the area’s history.

Along with the traditional meat — much of which is raised or hunted by the Castelli family — try the *crostini neri*, a must-have Tuscan appetizer of chicken liver on toasted bread. Locals regularly order the vegetable soup to take home. And if you’re there when they’re in season, don’t

overlook the porcini mushrooms — especially the fried versions served here.

If you’re lucky, Paolo will offer the family’s homemade *vin santo* — the delicious Tuscan dessert wine.

Trattoria Dardano

Via Dardano, 24
(39) 0575 601944
www.trattoriadardano.com

Open daily for lunch and dinner.

The Hot Place
TO EAT RIGHT NOW

For an award-winning interpretation of typical Tuscan dishes, try *Osteria del Teatro*, on a side street north of *Piazza della Repubblica*. For its 25th anniversary this year, *Chef Emiliano Rossi* (see story on page 4) added to the moderately priced menu by creating seven specialized dishes featuring traditional recipes and ingredients stamped with his creative interpretation, which will continue to be available.

The first dish features the region’s most famous product — *Chianina* beef,

cooked with local olive oil, a deceptively simple approach. The second dish combines three typical rabbit recipes into one plate, employing the distinctly local flavors of fennel and rosemary.

Another plate features salted codfish, or *baccala*, the dish Emiliano prepared when he won the bronze medal at the Italian Cooking Championships.



Frances with Emiliano Rossi

For the pork fillet made with plums, Emiliano studied the history of the Renaissance recipe, adding red wine to heighten the

sweet-and-savory — or *agrodolce* — combination.



Trattoria Dardano

Osteria del Teatro

Via Maffei, 2
(39) 0575 630556
www.osteria-del-teatro.it

Open Thursday to Tuesday for lunch and dinner.
Closed Wednesday.

To Die For
PECORINO SOUFFLE

Tucked just off *Piazza della Repubblica*, you can find classic, moderately priced Tuscan comfort food in a cozy atmosphere at *Trattoria La Grotta*. As the name implies, meals are served in two cave-like stone dining rooms or outside in the courtyard. If you look closely at lunchtime, you might see the elderly gentleman who has been dining there every day at the same table for years.

For starters, try the *Pecorino* cheese souffle topped with onion jam and

Under the Tuscan Sun was



orange marmalade. There's a good selection of homemade pasta, such as *pici* with duck sauce. The meats include beef with rosemary and a pork chop with balsamic vinegar that's a favorite with regulars. Roasted potatoes with rosemary are a typical side dish in Cortona, and the ones served here are standouts. The homemade desserts include a fabulous chocolate *ricotta* cheesecake. The house wine is served in Cortona-style pottery pitchers.

Trattoria La Grotta

Piazza Baldelli, 3
(39) 0575 630271
www.trattorialagrotta.it
Open Wednesday to Monday for lunch and dinner.
Closed Tuesday.



Il Falconerie



Pici at Il Falconerie

A recent lunch in the soothingly elegant dining room — located in the ancient villa's former *limonaia* — lasted three delicious hours with three courses, each paired with a Baracchi wine. A medley of root vegetables and a homemade *pici* dish were followed by a showstopping version of

panzanella, the traditional Tuscan bread salad, molded into a crown



Bottega Baracchi

with fresh fava beans, chicory sprouts and pecorino cheese. The tasting menus start at 100€ per person.

Il Falconerie

Loc. San Martino a Bocena, 370
(39) 0575 612679
www.ilfalconiere.it
Open daily for lunch and dinner.

Wine Bar with DELICIOUS DINING

In Cortona, you also can get a more casual — and less expensive — taste of the Baracchi family's handiwork at *Bottega Baracchi*, a wine bar and Tuscan bistro with a contemporary vibe. Its outdoor terrace overlooking Piazza Garibaldi and the valley beyond is a spectacular spot for cappuccino in the morning or *aperitivo* in the evening — and the seats often fill quickly.

It's a good choice for grabbing a pastry in the mornings or a *panino* at lunch. The restaurant also serves lunch and dinner in a cozy dining room on the

lower level, a particularly good spot on a rainy day, which combines traditional Tuscan elements with hip modern art.

Bottega Baracchi

Via Nazionale, 78
(39) 0575 613874
www.bottegabracchi.com
Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The Café Life APERTIVO TIME

There are several excellent *aperitivo* venues where you can enjoy a *prosecco* or an Aperol spritz before dinner, many of which set up tables outside, perfect for watching people as they enjoy *la passeggiata*, the evening stroll through town. *Tuscher Café* offers one-of-a-kind cocktails. Proprietors *Massimo Olivieri* and *Daniela Ottonello* will mix your drink of choice — or surprise you with an original concoction. They run the café with their two sons, *Niccolo* and *Edoardo*.

The restaurant is a great spot for a morning *espresso* and pastry. For lunch there are pasta dishes, salads and homemade desserts — plus what many locals consider the best hamburger in town. The café doesn't serve dinner, but *aperitivo* is served with a creative selection of *antipasti*. The restaurant features a rotating display of original artwork, often for sale, which combines with a jazz-infused playlist to create a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Tuscher Café

Via Nazionale, 43
(39) 0575 62053
www.caffetuschercortona.com
Open Tuesday to Sunday for breakfast, lunch and aperitivo.
Closed Monday.

Michelin-Star DINING

For a high-end interpretation of classic Tuscan dishes, splurge on fine dining at the Michelin-starred *Il Falconiere*, part of the *Relais & Chateaux* hotel and spa located just outside Cortona. (See story on page 5.) You'll find *Chef Silvoia Baracchi's* imaginative options ranging from baked suckling pig to mackerel *ravioli* to the signature stuffed pigeon with sautéed minted artichoke.

They're all accompanied by vintages from *Baracchi* — you are overlooking the vines as you eat — headed by her husband, Ricardo, including the award-winning Brut Rosé. Both Silvia and Ricardo are hands-on hosts; she regularly teaches cooking classes and chats with guests in the dining room, while he conducts tours of the winery.

actually filmed at *Villa Laura*.

Authentic Places to

WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING A PLACE TO REST YOUR HEAD IN CORTONA, YOU HAVE THE COMPLETE RANGE OF OPTIONS — FROM LUXURY HOTELS TO MORE AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATIONS PLUS B&BS AND AGRITURISMI — BOTH INSIDE THE TOWN WALLS AND IN THE NEARBY COUNTRYSIDE. HERE ARE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS:

Monastero di Cortona HOTEL & SPA

Once a historic monastery, *Monastero di Cortona Hotel & Spa* has recently been



Monastero di Cortona Hotel & Spa transformed into a luxurious modern hotel. The elaborate *Murano* glass chandelier in the lobby sets the tone for this elegantly understated hotel. You can sleep where monks once lived in the 40 rooms, featuring beamed ceilings and travertine marble.

The bar features remnants of frescoes dating to 1676 that were uncovered during the renovation, and the spa with an indoor swimming pool is set in an ancient Roman cistern. The spa is open to hotel guests and non-guests. There's an outdoor courtyard with a plunge pool and stunning views of the valley.

Guests must be 12 years and older.

Via del Salvatore
(39) 0575 1785839
www.monasterodicortona.com
Rates: Double rooms start at 149€, with breakfast.



Hotel SAN MICHELE

With a convenient location on a main street just steps from the



Hotel San Michele historic city center, *Hotel San Michele* is housed in the restored 15th-century *Palazzo Baldelli*. The thoughtfully renovated building is listed as a national monument by the Italian Ministry of Art, and it houses a 15th-century fresco depicting the Madonna and Child.

The boutique hotel features 40 rooms, each appointed with antique Tuscan furniture. A suite in the former palace's tower has recently been transformed into a wellness area called *La Torretta*. You can enjoy the Jacuzzi tub while taking in panoramic views.

Via Guelfa, 15
(39) 0575 604348
cortonaluxuryaccommodation.com/sanmichele/
Rates: Doubles start at 116€, with breakfast.

Hotel SAN LUCA

Smack dab in *Piazza Garibaldi*, *Hotel San Luca* offers convenient access to

Cortona as well as panoramic views of the valley. Both the breakfast room and a new fitness center offer sweeping views. It's worth the extra cost for a room that opens to a balcony.



View from Hotel San Luca



B&B Dolce Maria

The hotel adjoins *Ristorante Tonino*, an elegant restaurant

with a traditional Tuscan menu. You can enjoy the view for lunch or dinner, outside on the patio or in the open-air terrace. The hotel is located steps from a primary drop-off for taxis and the local bus service, and it's near free and paid parking areas.

Piazza Garibaldi 1
(39) 0575 630460
www.sanlucacortona.com
Rates: Doubles start at 54€ with breakfast.

B&B DOLCE MARIA

Along with hotels, there are numerous bed and breakfasts, including *B&B Dolce Maria*, a quaint inn tucked on a quiet side street just steps from *Piazza della Repubblica*. Run by *Paola Barboni* and her family, the six rooms are located above their family residence in a building that dates to the 1400s.

Cortona was originally a city

Stay IN CORTONA

The rooms have splendid views of the city's roofs and the valley beyond. The *La Torretta* room has a fireplace and an original stone spiral staircase that leads to a private rooftop terrace.

The family runs the adjacent restaurant, *Locanda al Pozzo Antico*, with a cozy dining room, an inner garden-like courtyard and cooking classes by *Paola*.

Via Ghini, 12
(39) 0575 62091
www.cortonastorica.com

Rates: Double rooms start at 70€ with breakfast.



Il Falconiere

Il Falconiere is part of the prestigious *Relais & Chateaux* association of international boutique hotels. The 17th-century country villa was once home to the famous poet *Antonio Guadagnoli*, but more recently it was the family home of *Ricardo Baracchi*. He runs this immaculate property and its adjacent vineyards alongside his wife, *Silvia Baracchi*, a Michelin-starred chef. (See story on page 5.)

The 22 guest rooms are decorated in the kind of refined style you'd expect to find in a high-end Tuscan country villa. The rooms are sprinkled among several buildings, including the historic villa and chapel, giving the property the feel of a *borgo* — a tiny, self-contained hamlet — rather than a hotel.

It also includes the *Il Falconiere* restaurant. Cooking classes are taught by Silvia and Executive Chef *Richard Titi*. The spa offers a range of treatments — how about a relaxing bath immersed in wine? — and is open to guests and non-guests. The spa uses

products from *Santa Maria Novella*, the famed pharmacy in Florence that dates to 1221 which now has a shop in Cortona.

Yes, there is a falcon from which the property takes its name: Her name is *Lilla*, and she lives outside the chapel.

Loc. San Martino a Bocena, 370
(39) 0575 612679
www.ilfalconiere.it

Rates: Classic rooms start at 230€ with breakfast.

Agriturismo I PAGLIAI

For a stay in the countryside, *Agriturismo I Pagliai* offers the chance to stay in a 17th-century farmhouse in the tiny hamlet of *Montalla*, at the foot of the Cortona hillside a few miles from town, owned by *Vittorio Camorri*. (See story on page 5.) You'll hear the rooster crowing and the dogs barking and, if you're lucky, the goose who lives across the street will visit.

Choose from individual apartments in two rustic buildings that feature terracotta floors, beamed ceilings, wrought-iron beds and full kitchens — all tastefully decorated with classic Tuscan furnishings and linens. Each bedroom has a private bath with shower. The manicured grounds are home to a swimming pool, wood-burning oven and outdoor dining areas.

I Pagliai translates to "haystacks," an homage to the property's agricultural history.

Montalla 23
(39) 0575 603676

www.facebook.com/AgriturismoIPagliai/

Rates: Apartments begin at 600€ a week with breakfast, and weekend options are also available.

Relais LA CORTE DEI PAPI

A country residence dating to the 1700s that has been in the Papi family for generations, *La Corte dei Papi* sits a few miles outside of town. *David Papi* and his mother, *Gabriella*, have restored the villa, respecting its history while adding modern amenities.

The luxurious property has become a favorite for honeymooners, with 15 romantic rooms featuring spa bathtubs and a Turkish bath. The restaurant is located in what was once the villa's



Il Falconiere



I Pagliai



Relais La Corte dei Papi

www.lacortedeipapi.com

Rates: Rooms start at 300€, with breakfast.

cellar. In the summer, the garden adjacent to the swimming pool is transformed into an outdoor dining room. And you simply can't miss the new event space, perfect for destination weddings and handpainted in gold by artisans from Florence.

You can read more about this exquisite place in the June/July 2018 issue of *Dream of Italy*.

Via La Dogana, 12
(39) 0575 614109

controlled by the Umbrians.

CAN YOU BUY A HOME

Under the

The opening line of *Under the Tuscan Sun* sets the stage for Frances Mayes to explore the dream and document the reality of owning a home in Italy.

For Frances and her husband, Ed, the story has a happy ending. And it leads many to wonder: Is it possible to do what Frances and Ed did?

The short answer is yes; the longer answer is that it's complicated.

THE Cost

For many, getting to that happy ending begins with the bottom line. Prices in the Cortona area have come down from the peak that followed the book and movie, says *Alison Koetser* with the Cortona International Agency. "Right now, it is a buyer's market and an excellent time to invest," she says, adding that countryside properties are the most popular with buyers at the moment.

"These days, if you can buy and restore a three-bedroom home with a pool within a budget of 800,000€," she says, "you're making a sound investment." (See pricing guide on next page.)

THE Experience

Ken Spradley first came to Cortona as an American college student in 1983.

"The place was a vortex," says Ken. "It called me back again and again." It would be more than three decades before he purchased a two-bedroom

apartment in Cortona, and he waited five years for the price to drop to fit his budget.



Liebenow living room during renovation

Sherrie Liebenow visited Cortona because she'd read Frances' book. Two years later, she and her husband, Frank, worked with *Roberto Ghezzi* at Cortona International to buy a two-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment.



Liebenow living room, finished

"We looked at several places in June, made an offer that was accepted in July, closed in September — and spent our first night in our *casa* in June of the following year," says Sherrie.

Their apartment needed major renovation, including plumbing, lighting and flooring. Because obtaining permits took "a significant amount of time," Sherrie says, most work didn't start until months later. Not being on site when the work took place was difficult, she adds, but their agent sent lots of pictures.

Barbara and Abel Zalberg first visited Cortona for their son's nearby wedding, eventually buying a home in the valley. They soon realized they wanted to be closer to Cortona, so they purchased a second house.

The Zalbergs now rent their original home — a three-bedroom, three-bath

house in a residential complex — listing it with a local property management company. Many people buy with the intention of renting the property during high season, says Alison.

THE Legalities

Then there are the three L's — legalities, logistics and language. That process is what Frances documented in her book. "It was just one of those instant fall-in-love moments for me," she recalls on the *Dream of Italy Podcast*. "But to buy the house is quite a different thing."

As with real estate transactions anywhere, there are documents to obtain, bank accounts to open and utilities to establish. That's where a local agent can help. The Liebenows' agent obtained their



Liebenow kitchen during renovation

agent obtained their *codice fiscale* — a required legal document — and helped them open a bank account.



Liebenow kitchen, finished

It also helps to embrace the local customs. "I always try to make them understand that when they buy a property in Tuscany, it is not just an investment in the strict sense, but it is precisely opening your soul to a different lifestyle that will help them to have another — and

unexpectedly beautiful — point of view on things," explains *Lorenzo Lucani* of *Toscana Servizi Immobiliari*.

A good agent integrates clients into the community to help offset potential problems, agrees Alison.

The hill town of Cortona sits

Tuscan Sun?



Rodney and Susan Hughes took that into account when they hired a local architect who had completed many projects in the area. “The logic of this is that the drawings submitted will not be unnecessarily delayed because the council will know that local architects will most likely employ local tradespeople,” explains Rodney.



Zalberg property before, during and after renovation

The eventual plan called for removing g walls to open the space, gutting the outdated kitchen, and replacing flooring and lighting throughout the apartment, which also has a large terrace. The design process took about a year, while the construction phase lasted about seven months.

Having done similar historic renovations in England, the Hugheses also took their time, personally

completing much of the restoration of their apartment over several years. They replaced floor tiles, stripped paint from the original chestnut beams, replaced iron water pipes and repaired water damage from the roof terrace in the top floors of a 16th-century townhouse.

When they uncovered old reed matting, they asked their architect whether it would be protected under Italian regulations.

No, the architect told them, “In Italy, 400 or 500 years is not old.” Rodney says, “This for us put everything into perspective.”

THE Logistics

The logistics of renovating can take months or years, depending on the scale of the project and the time needed to obtain permits and complete construction. For the Zalbergs, renovating their second house — located on the hillside just outside Cortona — took about two years.

“We had to replace everything in the house,” says Barbara. That included water, electric, roof, windows, heating and air conditioning. “It was basically stripped down to the studs. It was a three-bedroom, two-bath house, and we made it a four-bedroom, four-bath house with two kitchens and two living rooms.”

Their key to success was having friends keeping on eye on things when they were not in town. “If you don’t have an advocate for you there, the way we did it would have been impossible,” advises Barbara.

“The design phase for this project was me doodling layouts and features in my sketchbook,” recounts Ken, who struggled to find a concept that would work with the existing plumbing.

THE Language

These homebuyers agree the language difference was the biggest obstacle to overcome during the buying process, making translation services an essential expenditure. That’s among the fees to expect, along with a *geometra*, who checks the property’s legal and structural state, and a *notaio*, a public official who specializes in property sales.

In the end, these Cortona homeowners offer remarkably similar advice for others considering pursuing the dream of living under the Tuscan sun. “Just do it. You won’t regret it,” says Julie. Ken agrees: “Let the journey be your adventure.”



Cortona Real Estate PRICING GUIDE

- Properties (villas and farmhouses) with 4+ bedrooms near town = 1 million€ plus
- Properties in town command a premium because of proximity to Cortona’s social aspects.
 - +Studio with terrace and view = 180,000€
 - +3-bedroom house with garden, view = 745,000€
- Properties (2 to 3 bedrooms) in residential complexes = 220,000€ and up, plus condominium fees in the range of 350€ per month
- Properties to restore, (1,600 to 2,700 square feet or 150 to 250 square meters) = 400,000€ or lower to be worthwhile investment
- Restoration costs = 2,000 to 2,500€ per square meter with permissions and taxes

Source: Alison Koetser, Cortona International Agency

1€ = \$1.11 at press time

at an elevation of 1621 feet.

What to Do in Cortona

SPECIAL EVENTS

Archidado: In late May and early June, the *Archidado Joust* commemorates the 1397 wedding of the *Lord of Cortona* to a noblewoman from *Siena*.



Frances and Kathy

Events include costume parades, medieval dinners, medieval markets, falconry demonstrations, magic shows and flag-flying performances. The five neighborhoods of Cortona compete in a crossbow tournament, and there is a re-enactment of the wedding. For more information, visit www.giostraarchidado.com.

Cortona Jazz Festival: This series of concerts takes place in April, but organizers also hold related events during the summer and winter. To see the schedule, visit www.cortonajazz.eu



Wine Dine Shine

Wine, Dine and Shine: Every Thursday from May through October, Cortona hosts a collaborative wine dinner. *Enoteca Molesini* hosts a complimentary wine tasting in *Piazza Repubblica* (which all are welcome to attend whether you go on for the rest of the night or not). Guests can borrow jewelry for the evening from *DelBrenna Jewelry*. Dinner rotates among local restaurants, pairing the highlighted wines with special dishes. Afterward, head to *Il Granaio* for a cocktail. Reservations are required for the dinners and they sell out. For more information, visit www.winedineshine.com

Cortona Mix: In July, Cortona is home to a five-day festival that offers a purposeful mixture of art forms — music, literature, film, dance, politics and philosophy. Cortona Mix features headlining concerts from Italian and



Cortona Mix

international bands along with regional orchestras and ensembles. Designed to highlight the interconnectedness of the arts, it includes conversations with authors, filmmakers and academics. For more information, go to www.mixfestival.it

Cortona on the Move: The annual photography festival takes place from July through September, featuring hundreds of images from dozens of photographers. For more information, visit www.cortonaonthemove.com

Food Festivals: In August, Cortona celebrates two regional specialties. The T-bone steak festival — *Sagra della Bistecca* — takes place over three days in conjunction with *Ferragosto* on August 15 in the city's park. The porcini mushroom festival — *Sagra del Fungo Porcino* — takes place in the park the following weekend.

WALKING TOUR

Enchanting Walk:

DelBrenna has created a self-guided tour of locations from Frances Mayes' book and movie *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

There are signs that start at *Piazza della Repubblica* and end at the *DelBrenna* showroom. You can pick up a map from *DelBrenna*. If you would like a guide for an enhanced two-hour tour that also goes to *Bramasole*, visit www.travelstotuscany.com. The costs start at 30€ per person or 95€ with a *DelBrenna* gift bag.



Enchanting Walk Sign

SITES TO VISIT

MAEC Museum: One of the most important Etruscan museums in Italy, MAEC also displays Roman and Egyptian items, art and artifacts from the Medieval and Renaissance eras, plus artwork by

Cortona natives *Luca Signorelli*, *Pietro of Cortona* and *Gino Severini*. Open daily from April through October; closed Monday, November to March. For more information, visit www.cortonamaec.org

Museo Diocesano: Founded after World War II to safeguard and showcase works from Cortona's religious institutions, the Diocesan Museum features the *Annunciation*, a stunning altarpiece by

Fra Angelico, an entire room devoted to masterpieces

by Luca Signorelli and the



The Anunciation

sketches of the Stations of the Cross mosaics by Gino Severini that line the walk up the hillside to the *Basilica of Santa Margherita*.

Open daily from April through October; closed Monday, November to March.

Fortezza di Girifalco: Over the years, Cortona's fortress was sacked, sold and restructured before being fortified by the *Medici*. It served as a city prison and later as a strategic position for both the Germans and the Allies during World War II. Open daily. Admission is 5€. For more information, visit www.fortezza-del-girifalco.it

Eremo Le Celle: About two miles outside the center of Cortona, built into a wooded hillside next to a flowing stream, is the first monastery founded by *St. Francis of Assisi*, around 1211, which continues to be inhabited by Capuchin Friars. You can see the tiny cell where *St. Francis* stayed shortly before his death. If you'd like one of the monks to pray with you, simply ring the bell on the door. Open daily.



Le Celle St. Francis

Santa Margarita is the patron saint of Cortona.