

# the resident

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January 2009

## PLAIN SAILING

The perfect family holiday in Turkey

*Retail therapist*

Jigsaw's Belle Robinson



## IMMERSE YOURSELF

*In our health and beauty issue*

DETOX DIARY • FABULOUS FACIALS • GET FIT IN ROME



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Visit Peach on the Hill for all your health and beauty needs. Peach on the Hill, 140 Campden Hill Road, W8 7AS 020 7221 9464, peachonthechill.com

Front cover by Rebecca Williams  
rebeccawilliamsart.com



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# Spa-rkling scenery

The rolling Tuscan hills and ancient city of Rome entice Lydia Williams on a cultural wellbeing break



Above, The Ponte San Angelo with the Vatican City in the distance; left, the Jardin de Russie

## ROME

**HOTEL** The Hotel de Russie, Rocco Forte's Roman outpost, shares a postcode with Miu Miu, Chanel, Versace and Tiffany on the Via del Babuino. As we smugly slip through the throngs of fur, diamond and designer-clad shoppers, we are following with more than an enviable gaze. For the Hotel de Russie is somewhat of a marvel in central Rome.

The hotel was built in 1837 by architect Valadier, incorporating one of the largest and most stunning internal courtyard gardens. The Jardin de Russie is a famous oasis, regularly visited by Picasso and Cocteau, who once described it as "paradise on earth". Originally a modest vineyard, Valadier created a 'secret garden', full of orange and fig trees, roses and hidden 'resting areas', from which residents could enjoy the tranquil vista. In May 2006 the Hotel and WWF put their heads together to create a rare butterfly sanctuary within the Jardin de Russie, only adding to its magical feel.

Our suite, a marriage of the finest modern design with ancient Italian methods and materials (marble and mosaic) was the perfect sanctum away from the pace of the city.

**WELLBEING** We seemed to be the only one's making the most of the hotel's state-of-

the-art gym and spa facilities. With the complex to ourselves we virtuously worked out, then rewarded ourselves with a steam, sauna and dip in the bijoux but deliciously relaxing, hydro pool.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENT** Post work-out I booked in for the spa's signature colour massage (€135 for 1h20mins). The orange infused treatment, so called as the colour orange has a warming effect, that uplifts the spirit and increases energy – the perfect winter pick me up, begins with orange blossom infused paraffin booties being placed on my tired feet to revive and soften. A body and facial massage follows, focusing on rebalancing charkas and creating a sense of balance and harmony, the facial is a great injection of

## Doing press-ups in an olive grove is certainly one way to see the Tuscan countryside

Vitamin C into my dull London skin, leaving it with a luminosity that only a 'two-week break', has previously achieved.

**SIGHTS AND SOUNDS** After a litre or two of vino the night before, the 6.45am start for our 12km bicycle tour was a tough one. Not to mention the fact that our tour guide for the two-hour trip would be Italian triathlete champion, Danilo Palmucci. The whistle stop marathon that we had braced ourselves for never materialised, as Palmucci, a Roman born and bred, led us at a leisurely 'Italian pace' to meet some of his friends – the sights of Rome. Rather fittingly, our journey began at the Piazza di Popolo, where pilgrims would have entered the city on the final leg of their

journey to the Vatican City. I have been to Rome more than a dozen times but this was different, it was like being given the keys to Disneyland after hours. The Spanish Steps seemed bigger, grander, almost eerie in the absence of a thousand 'culture hungry' tourists. We wove our way down cobbled back streets, disorientated and simultaneously intoxicated by the aroma of espresso and fresh pastries as Rome woke up, only to arrive in another square and discover another of Rome's jewels. The Trevi Fountain, Piazza Navona, Roman Forum, Pantheon and the Vatican City – they were all ours for the taking and we didn't have to share them with anyone. Palmucci's informative and insightful historical interjections brought the sights to life and as a local, he was able to impart nuggets of knowledge, that the guidebooks leave out. I have followed the Inca Trail to Macchu Piccu and scaled the Great Wall of China, but cycling across the Ponte San Angelo (Bridge of Angels) to watch the sunrise behind the dome of St. Peter's will be added to that hallowed list of 'once in a lifetime' moments. We shared breakfast with Palmucci in front of the Pantheon before he dropped us back at the hotel and, with a dreamy wave goodbye, we watched his sleek silhouette vanish over the cobblestones.

It was only later that day when we ventured out again for a stroll and saw all our cherished sites teaming with tourists then we realised, again, how lucky we had been. (Two hour cycle tour, from €80 per person). **A night at Rocco Forte's Hotel de Russie starts from £608 for a classic double room on a room only basis.** Hotel de Russie, Via del Babuino 9, 00187 Rome, +39 06 32 88 81 [roccofortecollection.com](http://roccofortecollection.com)

## FLORENCE – GROTTA GIUSTI

**HOTEL** The story goes that in the nineteenth century, local labourers in Monsummano were working in a quarry for local landowner, Guiseppe Giusti, when they unearthed a 130 million year old thermal cave. News spread of the thermal waters that sprung forth, and of their medicinal qualities, and by 1853 Giusti's country residence had been converted into a spa retreat for visiting nobility.

Today, the hotel's modern, simple rooms have thermal water flowing from the taps, and paraden-free toiletries – continuing the spa's philosophy. Downstairs, in the hotel's sleek bar, bartender Francesco Igllo, an international award-winning mixologist, makes a Mimosa (freshly squeezed orange juice and champagne) to die for. Sink into the multitude of sofas and gaze skywards to the original frescoed ceilings and decadent Murano glass chandeliers.

**WELLBEING** The hotel's scheduled morning walk is a great, pre-breakfast, wake-up call. Utilising the 45 hectares of ancient parkland, you are guided through the grounds at a military pace, stopping at 'workout stations' to do progressively arduous exercises – doing press-ups in an olive grove is certainly one way to see the Tuscan countryside.

The original thermal cave or 'grotto', is the centre of the spa's facilities – derobing in the first chamber, 'heaven', we were left to acclimatise, reclining in the eerily quiet depths. Gradually we moved further on through the cave network, to 'purgatory' and finally to 'hell', with a 98 per cent humidity. The natural steam bath, infused with minerals, is a great detox, as well as relieving muscular and skeletal aches and pains. Emerging from our underground retreat, a dip in the 750m<sup>2</sup> thermal pool, naturally maintained at a steamy 35 degrees, is a glorious reintroduction to the world above. Recline on one of the underwater massaging beds and, at twilight, watch the bats flit overhead underneath a blanket of stars.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENT** There is something of the prison shower block about the spa's hydrotherapy massage treatment. Wearing a bathing suit to protect your modesty, you stand under a conventional shower, whilst a therapist 'hoses

you down' with a high-power water jet. The stimulation is good for joints, cellulite and general circulation. Thankfully, it only lasts a brief four minutes and afterwards I admit, my cellulite did feel pummelled into submission. (thermal hydromassage, €10 for four minutes).

**SIGHTS AND SOUNDS** If you've done the Duomo, Uffizi and usual 'Florence trail', head to the left bank of the Arno, for artisan shops, galleries and antiques and a little more 'real Italian life'. Visit Salvatore Ferragamo's Museum (Palazzo Spini Feroni, Via Tornabuoni n. 2), run by the Ferragamo family, a shrine of photographs, sketches, books, magazines and wooden lasts of various famous feet. A must for Imelda Marcos-wannabes.

Dine at Il Latini restaurant, where people waiting for tables mill in the street outside (no queuing here) and are kept placated with hunks of parmesan and glasses of red wine. Once inside, duck under the ageing hams and take a seat, listen carefully as the proprietor rattles off the day's menu and be expected to order immediately. Shortly, a jug of red wine will be sloshed down in front of you with a mound of fresh bread to mop up the forthcoming ribollita, rabbit casserole and wild boar delights. Hearty, genuine and utterly Tuscan. (via dei Palchetti, 6/r, 50123, +39 055 210916).

**Via Grotto Giusti, 1411, 51015  
Monsummano Terme, Pistoria, Toscana  
+39 0572 90771**

## PISA – BAGNI DI PISA

**HOTEL** The thermal waters runneth over in San Giuliano Terme too, in fact, so important were they to the regeneration of Pisa in 1112, that in the following centuries the plains surrounding Pisa became home to a number of noble summer residences that were able to draw on the natural thermal phenomenon. In 1743 the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francesco Stefano di Lorena, took San Guilian as

his summer residence. His country retreat has been converted into the four-starred Bagni di Pisa, a grand stately home in the centre of the sleepy Tuscan village.

From the hotel's terrace, through the terracotta porticoes and amongst the fruit trees find the Kafe Hous, a summer house over looking the Tuscan plains to the city of Pisa. The hotel's Shelley Bar is so named as it is purported that the English author conceived the idea for Frankenstein during a visit. Here, the Sunday night tango evenings are held, like a scene from a Fellini film, we watched as austere men twirled beautiful Italian women around.

**WELLBEING** The Bagni di Pisa spa boasts its own grotto of sorts, the Hammam of the Grand Dukes. A small thermal cave, complete with bathing tub carved directly out of the rock, where you can soak in the 38 degree mineral waters. Recline in Roman splendor of the relaxation zone, complete with mosaic fountain and cathedral proportions. Try Watzu – a special meditative massage performed in water, combining the principles of Shiatsu, Yoga and Tai Chi – and a speciality of the spa.

**SIGNATURE TREATMENT** My Ayuvedic body and face treatment was an all-encompassing body overhaul. I was scrubbed, drizzled in hot oil and trussed up like the proverbial turkey, unveiled as a smoother, softer version of myself.

Rupabyangam treatment (€80 for 50 minutes).

**SIGHTS AND SOUNDS** San Giuliano Terme is 2km from Pisa and famed as the home of the marble quarry from which the materials to build the leaning tower were rent. Visit on a Sunday afternoon and pick your way through the flea market that winds its way through the streets surrounding the Piazza del Miracoli, or for a fitness alternative to sightseeing, hire a pedal buggy and work off your daily gelati.

**Bagni di Pisa, Largo Shelley, 18, 56017  
San Giuliano Terme, +39 050 88501**

**Two nights staying at Bagni di Pisa and three nights staying at Grotta Giusti, is from £735 per person, including breakfast and based on two people sharing with British Airways flights from London Gatwick to Pisa and Group B car hire. citalia.com, 0871 664 0253**



Far left, the thermal pool at Grotto Giusti; left, the decadent bar at Grotto Giusti; below, the Hammam of the Grand Dukes at Bagni di Pisa