

# Tour of a lifetime for food lovers

## Take a mouth-watering trip to delicious Rimini

**Y**OU know you've been on an unusual trip, one that will stay with you for a long time, when one of the highlights was a visit to a drug rehabilitation centre.

Especially when that same trip included a night at the Grande Hotel – a luxurious beachfront hotel where the iconic film maker Federico Fellini spent much of his life – and a further three days touring the finest restaurants, olive groves, cheese makers, vineyards and cafes in what I can only describe as the gastronomic tour of a lifetime.

For someone who eats most of his meals from a box with instructions telling me to pierce the lid several times before placing in a pre-heated oven – this proved to be one of the more enlightening, mouth-watering, few days of my life.

And it all started within an hour of landing at Rimini Airport when I pulled into the rustic, family owned Belvedere Locanda & Ristorante, in Saludecio, perched in the sun-drenched hills of the Emilia Romagna region.

My hosts Francesca Casadei and Mauro Ricciardelli, clearly keen to immerse me in Italian cooking, ushered me into the kitchen, kitted me out in an apron and hat and told me I was going to make pasta from scratch. Now I know pasta does not grow on trees but I had no idea it took quite so much kneading and pummeling to make a few platefuls of tagliatelle.

Infused with herbs plucked from the hillside, drizzled in extra virgin



**BY JONATHAN SCHOFIELD**

oil with a distinct peppery taste, it was the most delicious plate of pasta I've ever eaten.

It helps to be dining from a table overlooking vast swathes of this north east region of Italy surrounding the mountainous republic of San Marino. An area somewhat overlooked by its Tuscan neighbour but equally as impressive with castle-topped villages scattered amongst verdant hills set against the blue of the nearby Adriatic.

For about three hours dish after dish of utterly joyous food was brought to the table. Every morsel, every slice of salami, pork with quince and mushroom, leaf of salad, truffle, was picked, reared, produced and cooked within sight of the delightful retreat. There were long periods of silence amongst the guests at the table, only broken by murmurs of approval, little groans of joy – yes it really was that good.

After breakfast the following morning I debated moving in for a month but a day of culinary delights awaited at award-winning olive producers, who pluck their fruits from trees dating back to Norman times, and cheese makers who ferment their tantalizing produce deep in caves.

At every stop dish after dish of food was served, from bean stews to roast sheep cheeks and again endless bottles of local wine. I never knew food and landscape could be so inextricably linked – I've never felt that in Tesco.

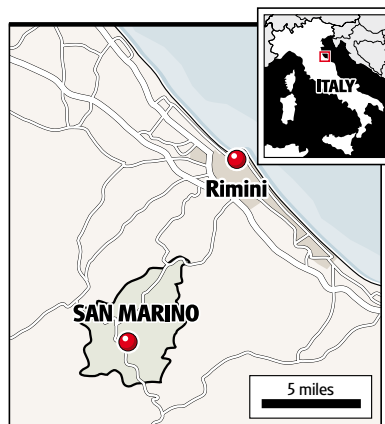
Forty kilometres of sandy beaches form an eye-catching ribbon of gold between the blue Adriatic and the green hills of the Rimini region as the bus wound its way towards the city – elasticated trousers being stretched to breaking point and head swimming with wine.

As I entered the Five Star Grande Hotel I tried to make it look like I only ever stay in such magnificent, marble clad, chandeliered hotels. I wandered through the hotel, out



**FINE FARE:** Jonathan Schofield indulging at San Patrignano with, above left, The Grande Hotel Rimini and, above right, The Bridge of Tiberius leading to Rimini's old town. Below left, Rimini's Arch of Augustus.

Pictures: CONTRIBUTED



on to the grand verandas and manicured gardens, and wished I owned a Panama suit, hat and leather brogues. I sat on the terrace, drank a cocktail called a Fellini – named after the legendary film maker from Rimini who had a permanent room at the hotel.

A brief walk along the beach, the sweet, salty smell of the sea and there was only one thing left to finish off the day – eat piles of grilled sardines, flame-licked giant prawns, octopus, squid, risotto and all washed down with local red and white wines at the Marianna restaurant in down-town Rimini.

From the table you can watch the beautiful Italian men and women sauntering past. Just 50 metres away are the arches of the ancient Roman Tiberius bridge leading to the historic centre of town which is filled with some of the finest Roman remains in Italy. It doesn't get much better than this.

That awareness that in Italy so much of life seems to complement everything else – food, architecture,

climate, landscape, style – but then there's always someone who mentions the difficulties of getting a plumber.

Just 30 minutes inland – towards the towering cliffs of San Marino – is a place called San Patrignano and a somewhat more sobering place to visit. It's the world's largest drug rehabilitation centre, so maybe not everyone's idea of a place to go on holiday. But if you want to go somewhere where I guarantee on numerous occasions you will say "wow" then you should go – it's important.

It's also one of the finest food and wine producers in the world. Last year, San Patrignano's cheese-makers – all recovering addicts who arrived there in a last-ditch attempt to throw off the curse of drug addiction – produced a goat's cheese which scooped the accolade of the world's best cheese.

We toured the bakery as great piles of crusty bread were brought from the ovens before they are delivered to shops and restaurants. We tasted delicious biscuits destined for Selfridges and toured the vineyards, stables, furniture making and glass-blowing workshops.

It's impossible to encapsulate what goes on here. I guarantee it's like nowhere you've ever been, I saw craftsmanship of utter beauty and tasted food and wine of exquisite joy. But it's the hope and camaraderie that struck me. No one leaves until they are trained craftsmen in their field, with a job set up, and a future without drugs.

I left with a full stomach, but also with a great sense of hope and a

### Key facts: Rimini

- Getting there, costs and websites: The region is served by three international airports: Rimini – Ryanair from London Stansted and Liverpool Bologna – BA and Easyjet from London Gatwick; Ryanair from Stansted, Gatwick and Edinburgh Parma – Ryanair from London Stansted Belvedere Locanda & Ristorante [www.belvederesaludecio.it](http://www.belvederesaludecio.it) Rooms from EURO 75 per night for a double room (2 people) and breakfast The restaurant is open every night for dinner for residents and non-residents
- The Grand Hotel [grandhotelrimini.com](http://grandhotelrimini.com) Rooms from EURO 160 per night for a double room (2 people) and breakfast
- San Patrignano [www.sanpatrignano.org](http://www.sanpatrignano.org)
- For more information on the region go to [www.riviera.rimini.it](http://www.riviera.rimini.it) and [www.riminiturismo.com](http://www.riminiturismo.com).

realisation that with imagination and determination anything is possible.

Back to Rimini as the sun came down and one last meal at a street cafe before the flight home. If delicious wine and food, stunning landscapes, ancient history and clear blue seas are something you value on a holiday then take a flight soon – but maybe go on a little fast beforehand.