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DECEMBER 12, 2017

CIN CIN! WHY VERONA IS THE PERFECT DESTINATION FOR A FESTIVE BREAK

With its winding cobbled streets transformed into twinkling grottos of light, Christmas is a magical time in Verona and is ideal for those seeking somewhere a little different to spend the festive period. If you are looking for a city break, Verona certainly ticks all the right boxes and then some.

Verona has always been on #TeamCoco's travel bucket list, but as we are fast approaching the holiday season, this felt like the perfect opportunity to visit. Verona embraces Christmas with typical Italian flair and joy and with people coming from all over Italy and beyond to visit Verona's Christmas market, it is fast increasing in popularity as a pre-Christmas chic destination.

We stayed at the palatial Palazzo Victoria hotel, a luxurious and intimate bolthole which stands in the ancient heart of the city of Verona. Just a short walk away from the famous Arena (a Roman amphitheatre) and close to the elegant Corso di Porta Borsari (one of Verona's main shopping streets), this five-star hotel is the epitome of the fusion between old and new, effortlessly combining rustic charm with contemporary styling.

The hotel has three wings, each one was previously a private home which dates to the Middle Ages. The basement of the building goes back to the Roman period and when you traverse from the splendor of the hotel lobby down to the basement, it is a truly unexpected but pleasant surprise. Within the hotel, you can see original frescoes from the Middle Ages that have been carefully preserved plus an original medieval door.

The historic features are emphasised by the incredible elegant modern styling of the hotel which features the most amazing chrome speakers, a 'living wall' and sumptuous furnishings by celebrated interior designer and architect Gaetano Pesce.

Each of the 74 rooms and suites scream opulence thanks to the marble bathrooms, the handmade Italian linen and antiques. All the rooms and suites are generously proportioned and feature dramatic soaring ceilings and have been innovatively designed to incorporate the preservation of original Veronese features.

After a light buffet lunch of cicchetti (and a cheeky glass or two of Prosecco!) we headed out to explore Verona. Despite the rain, it was still a wonderful experience wondering around the streets of Verona seeing Juliet's 'balcony', Romeo's 'door', the amphitheatre as well as some of Verona's impressive bridges like Ponte Scaligero and Ponte Pietra, the tombs of the renowned Scala family and more.

In the evening, we enjoyed a fantastic dinner at the hotels acclaimed restaurant Borsari 36 which showcases the very best of Italian cuisine, making it a popular choice for both guests and locals alike.

The restaurant's open kitchen and live cooking stations allows guests to watch their meals being prepared by Executive chef Camine Calò and his brigade. It was truly difficult to choose from such delicious and flavoursome dishes such as the risotto which complimented the crisp and refreshing Soave wine perfectly.

The following day, we headed off to the Valpolicella region in a vintage Rolls-Royce thanks to our operator Veronality who offer the most fabulous sightseeing tours of the city. From typical Veronese cooking classes to food and wine tours, the team offers most unconventional and unique experiences to visitors.

As we drove away from the bustling city, we were able to take in the most incredible panoramic views from the comfort of our Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow. Our destination? The Zýmē winery which is one of the most acclaimed wineries in the region.

As we arrived, a beautiful wolf appeared in the surrounding hills of the winery which was a slightly surreal but charming moment. The cellar, designed by architect Moreno Zurlo, exemplifies a synthesis between nature and people and even includes its own natural spring.

Culture, history, tradition and innovation have been instrumental to Zýmē's continued success and here they produce 11 wines (4 white and 7 red) all of which are stored in the cellar 15 metres underground.

After an intriguing tour of the winery, it was time to do a little tasting. In total, we tried five wines which included: 'From Black to White' (a savoury dry white wine) a Valpolicella (a young red) an 'Oselecta' featuring an indigenous grape of Verona and the standout wine (for me personally) the 'Amarone Reserve'. If you love your wine, then you simply must book at wine tasting tour at the Zýmē winery.

We were then whisked away in our vintage Rolls-Royce cars to a local eatery 'Enoteca della Valpolicella' which is a traditional Veronese style restaurant. With endless dishes being served (including the most delicious gluten free pasta) and our wine glasses being refreshed continuously, this was a sumptuous feast that was a true sensory experience.

As night fell, it was time to visit the Christmas market which is an annual event in Verona. The Nuremberg Christmas market is a German-style market which celebrates the festive period in style, with its traditional wooden stalls selling traditional Christmas foodie treats such as Vin Brulē, (the Italian equivalent of mulled wine) pecorino cheese and of course – panettone! handicrafts and Christmas tree decorations.

Just when we thought that we couldn't eat anymore it was time for dinner at local restaurant 'Al Torcolo' which has been managed by the Barca family since 1930. We enjoyed a traditional Veronese risotto with (our favourite!) Amarone wine and creamed pumpkin.

Our trip to Verona was over far too soon and we are already making plans for a return visit in the summer. The Palazzo Victoria is the ideal place to stay in the city for a truly luxurious break and the welcoming staff and comfortable surroundings truly makes it feel like a 'home away from home'.

This charming city is the perfect place not only to explore Verona, but Lake Garda too which is a just over an hour's drive away. If you love stunning architecture, a city that is steeped in history and culture and are a self-confessed foodie, then Verona must be your first port of call.

Italy specialist Classic Collection Holidays (0800 047 1064; classic-collection.co.uk) offers 3 nights at [Hotel Palazzo Victoria, Verona](https://www.classic-collection.co.uk/hotels/italy/verona/hotel-palazzo-victoria) at prices from £444 (low season) to £1189 (high season) per person during 2018. Prices based on 2 adults sharing on a bed & breakfast basis and includes return flights from London Gatwick to Verona and private transfers.

[Veronality](https://www.veronality.com/) offer a range of exciting bespoke private and group tours including cookery classes, wine tasting, vintage car and Vespa tours and more.

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Emma Harrison (<https://www.houseofcoco.net/author/emma-harrison/>)

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DECEMBER 12, 2017

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