



A luxurious villa in Tuscany - what do these words evoke?

Warmth, wine, food, friends and freedom? Yes and more.

Many of us read stories of other people's enticing experiences in this honey-coloured slice of Italy never dreaming that we too will be immersed in the fantasy-like environment. But dreams do come true!

For a teasingly short week, my husband and I were privileged to join the Viaggio crew at Villa Controni. I will try to share a sample of what we enjoyed.

I loved arriving in our palatial suite furnished with lavish Italian furniture made homely with the welcoming flowers, fruit, chocolates, a book explaining Lucca, past and present and delightful toiletries from Bulgari – all thoughtful gifts from Lance and Lisa Green our Viaggio hosts.

I loved the fact that we had a well-equipped gym and pool, as I knew that Lance's gastronomic talents would challenge our waistlines. Wandering around the grounds I allowed the peace of the expansive rolling hills, filled with vineyards and olive groves, to seep in to my tired body. I was beginning to live the Tuscan dream I had so often read about!

Our first evening introduced us to the tenor of our time in Lucca. Sitting at a long table covered with beautiful linen, adorned with roses and candles, we supped on good, yet inexpensive, Italian wines (I'm partial to the light bubbles of Prosecco) and ate the fresh unpretentious fare lovingly prepared by Lance and his Italian cohort in culinary creativity. Might I add here that as strangers to the Viaggio guests who had been exploring together for some time, we were unreservedly embraced into their fold.

An obvious hallmark of Viaggio vacations is the camaraderie created by the genuine warmth and care of Lance and Lisa who, though at all times are competent professionals, are also great fun and superb conversationalists!

The week was a beautiful balance between organized events and spontaneous surprises. My husband loved accompanying Lance on his daily forays to replenish the food.. A visit to the local butcher was a revelation. Never had a request for schnitzel been met with such passion and pride. The fish shop was an even greater revelation! Never had my experienced fisherman/husband seen flounder so expertly skinned - "zip, rip and presto it's done" he said. Likewise fresh sardines gutted and beheaded beautifully, ready for our tasty tapas that evening.

There was so much on offer – a day in Florence, a trip to the marble mines, exploring vineyards, bike rides, concerts, markets and shops in Lucca ... no pressure, only our pleasure a priority. Days doing nothing but reading by the pool were also definitely part of the parcel.

We had only a taste or a tease, but we've been hooked and look forward to returning to our Tuscan villa to immerse ourselves in the Italian good life.



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