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We had a warm welcome from the General Manager, Annabella Cariello. After getting settled into our rooms that are beautifully decorated and well thought out with the best of the best in technology and fixtures, we “broke the ice” the best way possible with our group enjoying a cocktail class with Francesco, the Il Piccolo bartender, who helped each person create their own cocktail masterpiece based on their favorite alcohol and mix-ins.

The location of Violino d'Oro makes it the perfect base to explore “the floating city”. Our first evening we discovered the city by foot with a stroll and cicchetti tour organized by our DMC, [Italy with Class](#). Our guide, Matteo, was such a pleasant host that really made the tour extra special. He took us to the best authentic local establishments for small plates and local wine, while he educated us on what it is like to grow up in Venice.

The next day we visited some of the islands of Venice. Our first boat stop was Murano to see and learn how they make their beautiful glass art at Venier Murano Glass. We then went over to the colorful island of Burano to visit Emilia Burano lace shop. We took a private boat taxi back to the hotel and had time to stroll through Piazza San Marco, enjoyed lunch at a local restaurant and did some shopping. We all agreed that March is a wonderful time to visit Venice, with mild temperatures and few crowds.

Emilia

From Venice, we moved inland. While you can travel by train or car from Venice to Emilia, for our group that was traveling with a lot of luggage, we thought it best to arrange a private transfer. The 2.5-hour drive (or 1.5 hours if coming from Milan) led us to discover Emilia. [Relais Roncolo 1888](#) is a sustainable borgo around the historic Villa Manodori in the hills of the 320-acre organic wine and balsamic estate Venturini Baldini. This boutique hotel is a travelers nest to explore the natural beauty of working vineyards and olive orchards, venture out to visit nearby cities Modena, Parma and Bologna, and savor the ultimate Emilian experience.

Following years of decline at the beginning of the 21st century, Villa Manodori and its surrounding buildings fell into disrepair and the estate became overgrown and rewilded – and then, finally, in 2015 the Prestia family (Julia and Giuseppe) arrived, whose energetic drive and endless passion is to protect and revitalize this extraordinary estate. Immediately focused on relaunching the wines with the help of renowned winemaker Carlo Ferrini, the couple recognized the unique natural beauty of the estate and set the path for the creation of a top-level hospitality offering, transforming the historic buildings of the estate to become the first wine & balsamic relais in Emilia. To bring

the relais to the next level, Julia brought on Massimiliano Draghi, Hotel Manager, who has assembled a stellar team of staff on property.

On the evening of our arrival we had a wine tasting, toured the impressive balsamic room and had what the group agreed was the best dinner of our trip at their onsite restaurant, Ristorante Limonaia. From presentation to taste, ambiance and let's not forget the Venturini Baldini wine, everything was perfection.

Our next day included a site visit of each of the distinct rooms making up the relais, along with exploring the estate. It should be noted that this is a great property for couples, groups of friends or multi-generational families. The three buildings that house the 17 guest rooms are just steps from each other with the main building, "Villa Manodori", consisting of six rooms that can be reserved individually, by floor, or secure the entire villa for an exclusive stay.

We enjoyed a pasta making class, with wine in hand (of course), followed by a lunch that included the pasta we created. With the onsite restaurant, balsamic & cooking experiences, winery, pool, trails for walking & cycling, scenic areas for picnics and wellness options that include a small gym, Friday morning yoga classes and in-room spa treatments, guests get to unwind and enjoy the estate at their leisure at this home away from home.

Roncolo 1888's location is prime for where Italy's food and motor valley meet, thus coining the term "slow food, fast cars". The Hotel Manager, Massimiliano "Max", took us to the nearby town of Maranello (30 minutes) to visit the Ferrari Museum (Maserati & Lamborghini are also in the area) followed by a delicious dinner at Massimo Bottura's restaurant, Ristorante Cavallino.

Lake Garda

The next day our 2-hour transfer led us to the last stop on our journey and to the perfect place to relax and renew. With panoramic views of one of literature's most celebrated lakes, [Cape of Senses](#) is poetry in action. Set high above Lake Garda, overlooking the picturesque village of Torri del Benaco.

Cape of Senses is the passion project of brothers Christian and Johannes Margesin and their father, Johann, who have been running the wellness oriented Alpiana in the mountains of South Tyrol since the 1970s. For years, the family dreamed of opening a sister property in the lakes region. When they happened upon an olive grove with spectacular views of Lake Garda for sale in 2018, the opportunity to create the resort they imagined arrived with a grand opening in July 2023.

Upon arrival we were greeted by the General Manager, Alina Deutsch. Alina is ray of sunshine that will ensure advisors and their clients will be taken care of during their stay. The 55-suite, adult-only (ages 14 and older) property that is open year-round is very important to her as she has been involved since its inception and is eager to continue to enhance the property as it is just in it's infancy. While everything is fully functional, there are always new ideas and opportunities ahead.

At our time of travel, the property was sold out, but never felt crowded. Guests can rise and shine with sun salutations on the unique panorama yoga platform, dip in the outdoor sports pool, and enjoy spa treatments along with a choice of three sauna and steam rooms, and relaxation areas with windows for walls. In the evening, experience fine dining and a curated selection of Italian wines under the stars at one of two rooftop restaurants.

Beyond Cape of Senses, year-round activities and experiences are available from private sailing tours to vineyard picnics that are bookable through its concierge service. We highly recommend renting one of e-Vespa's, as we spent a memorable Sunday morning riding along the gentle curves of Lake Garda with the mountains and lake on one side and olive groves on the other. Other group members enjoyed an easy hike with a local guide who was knowledgeable, fun and showcased the stunning views of the region. Guests can take a day trip to Verona or stay local and explore the charming boutiques and cafes of Torri del Benaco and Albisano. Just make sure you're back in time to watch the sunset from the hotel's outdoor bar terrace.

After two days of spa treatments, taking in the fresh air during the day and memorable evenings with drinks at the bar followed by delicious meals, our group was recharged and ready to venture to Milan (1.5-hour drive) to get ready to begin the week of DUCO Italy. WanderLuxe Destinations and some of our Italian partners hosted a lovely evening gathering in Milan for advisors to mix and mingle with our partner on an intimate level before the bigger event began.

The Italian saying "mangia bene, ridi spesso, ama molto" translating to "eat well, laugh often, love much," perfectly summarizes our week as our group became a FAMily who enjoyed fabulous properties, ate well and laughed often. Grazie mille (a thousand thanks) to our gracious partners and hosts. Until next time Italy...



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