



TRAVEL

Wine, olives and mud

MUD SPA from T1

Mud massages, regenerating body peels, blue-clay face masks and other health-inducing therapies are the big draw at Rapolano Terme, which lies 17 km east of Siena and is a three-hour drive north of Rome.

Italians and foreign visitors travel great distances and pay considerable sums to dilate their pores, massage their muscles, and purge unwanted toxins at Terme Antica Querciolaia and a second spa resort, San Giovanni Terme Rapolano, located on the outskirts of the town overlooking undulating vineyards and shimmering olive groves. Both spas invite guests to soak in 39C thermal pools heated naturally by underground hot springs while they shed pounds and smooth out wrinkles.

"This spa is more elegant than the one in Milan," said Marinella Sanvito, who was visiting Terme Antica for the first time. Between a beauty massage and a Turkish bath in the hammam, she wiled away the day, sipping sparkling water at the poolside and chatting with friends over a salad lunch on the terrace.

The Province of Siena, or Terre di Siena, embraces half a dozen spa resort towns similar to Rapolano Terme. These include Bagni delle Galleria, Terme di Petriolo, Montepulciano, Chianciano Terme, Bagno Vignoni, Castiglione d'Orcia, and San Casciano dei Bagni.

Over the centuries, this "land of thermal springs" has attracted an illustrious procession of popes, patriots, poets and patriarchs. Lorenzo the Magnificent, the Medici Family ruler of Florence, and his father, Pietro il Gottoso, Italian Queen Margherita of Savoy, Pope Pius II, Russian artist Marc Chagall, and Italian film director Federico Fellini all came to the Siennese countryside to bath in its curative waters.

We selected Rapolano Terme, because the town was a romping grounds for early Romans who frolicked in its hot springs and basked under its warm sun. We also hoped to savour the area's estate-bottled wine, flavourful local dishes, cobblestone paved villages and pastoral vistas.

"General Giuseppe Garibaldi, who led the unification of Italy, came often to Rapolano Terme to take the bath and spa treatment for his legs," said Chiara Ziliani, the owner of Il Molino della Lodola, the bed-and-breakfast inn where we were staying.

Over a Tuscan-style breakfast of fresh-baked pastries, goat cheese, prosciutto, cherry tomatoes, creamy yogurt and coffee, she re-

counted the history of Il Molino. Chiara inherited the Sitem Travertine Marble Co. from her grandfather and used the handsome white stone, quarried in nearby Rapolano Terme, to transform a decrepit 17th-century watermill complex into an upscale agritourism resort. Following a five-year restoration, the inn's six apartments and five guest rooms opened in December 2010.

Our exploration of Rapolano Terme started at the main town square, where we walked up into the old part of town past an ancient brick granary to a lookout with an unspoiled view of olive trees and gardens below. A maze of stone-paved streets led past cloistered houses with bright-green shutters and a small church where parishioners gathered for evening mass to the "Porta dei Tintori," a magnificent 14th-century archway.

As the early evening sun turned crimson, we drove to nearby Armaiolo village and ascended the steep zig-zagging street to Davide Canella Ristorante Enoteca. Canella, a young Tuscan-trained chef with international experience, opened his gourmet bistro in a renovated 17th-century cellar.

To impart an authentic taste of Tuscany, he regularly scours the province for locally grown produce and products, including cured meats from Casentino and Cinta Senese, saffron from the Val d'Orcia, and aged goat and sheep cheeses. Canella uses these farm-fresh ingredients to create modern, lighter versions of traditional recipes

while retaining the original flavors.

For dinner, we selected a Tuscan tasting menu of cured meats, hearty soup, homemade tagliolini, and succulent loin of lamb. The cool night air enhanced the flavor of our Tuscan delicacies and the Contucci Rosso di Montepulciano red wine we sipped at our outdoor table overlooking the valley below.

"Actor Morgan Freeman ate here last weekend," the chef told us. "He had steak tartar and salted fish."



CLAUDIA CAPOS PHOTO

Bathers luxuriate in an outdoor thermal-heated pool at Terme Antica.

JUST THE FACTS

ARRIVING Air Canada, Lufthansa offer overnight flights from Toronto to Rome Intercontinental Airport Leonardo da Vinci. Car rentals available at the airport through major companies.

SLEEPING Agriturismo Molino della Lodola, Strada San Paterno, 53040 Rapolano Terme, Siena. molinodellalodola.com. Agriturismo La Lodola, Strada delle Chiarne, 3, 53041 Asciano. lalodola.it

DINING Davide Canella Ristorante Enoteca, Via del Finimondo, 6, Armaiolo, 53040 Rapolano Terme, Siena. davidecanella.it

THERMAL SPAS Terme Antica Querciolaia, Via Trieste, 22, 53040 Rapolano Terme, Siena. termeaq.it San Giovanni Terme Rapolano, Via Terme San Giovanni, 52, 53040 Rapolano Terme, Siena. termesangiovanni.it

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