



travel

La Residenza Napoleone III, Rome

Fairweather's friends

Catherine Fairweather helps Italophiles experience the real Italy in real style



QUESTION Italy is our favourite holiday destination, and we are about to visit Rome and Florence for the third time. Having already enjoyed all the usual touristic rituals, we are keen to get under the skins of these cities. What do you suggest?

ANSWER Learn some Italian, don't order a cappuccino after your lunch, and opt for an apartment instead of an hotel. Using your own front-door key, having to find

your bearings within the locality, living in your own space and doing your own food shopping will make you feel more in tune with the rhythms of the city.

Q But what about other people's (dodgy) taste? We don't want a cramped condo in the suburbs; we still want the sense of occasion you get when you stay in a landmark hotel.

A You can't do better for a sense of atmosphere and occasion than La Residenza Napoleone III in Palazzo Ruspoli (+39 347 733 7098), at the foot of the Spanish Steps

in Rome. Once the residence of Emperor Napoleon, this piano nobile apartment, with vast rooms, is filled with brocades and antiques, and comes, on request, with a butler, laundry service and chauffeurs, as well as maid service, stereo, video and minibar. Alternatively, there is the Roof Garden Suite. This is smaller and much less grand, but, in compensation, it has a terrace which provides cinematic views over the rooftops of Rome.

In Florence, I recommend the Frediano apartment in Palazzo Magnani Feroni (+39 055 239 9544), situated close to the Ponte Vecchio, which belongs to the noble Rucellai dynasty. For apartments in Venice, see page 248, or contact Venetian Apartments on 020 8878 1130; www.venice-rentals.com.

Q Sounds not so much like living as a local, but more like treading in the footsteps of the old aristocracy. How does a slice of this privilege compare price-wise with the best hotels? **A** The Roof Garden at Palazzo Ruspoli costs from 600 euros a night, including breakfast – much less than a night in a junior suite at the neighbouring Hotel Russie (1,000 euros). The Frediano sleeps five and costs from 1,600 euros a week. □



LUXE FOR LESS

Monte Velho is a simply converted Alentejo farmhouse set in an ecological reserve on the south-west tip of Portugal, and is powered by solar and wind energy. Owner Henrique Balsamão has created a relaxed, intimate hotel, with seven cosy suites. Bright paintings line the walls, and the rush-matted sitting room is stacked with board games and books on surfing. Dense scrubland and rolling pine forests stretch down to the sea. Nearby, unspoilt sandy beaches have superb surf. Monte Velho Nature Resort, Carrapateira, Aljezur, Portugal (+351 966 007 950) costs from 100 euros a room a night, or book with Original Travel (020 7978 7333).

And finally Last chance to...

Cruise the Three Gorges on the Yangtze river



The building of the biggest dam in the world across its third-longest river is

about to alter forever the natural splendour of the magnificent Three Gorges in China. Be sure to enjoy this timeless scenery at its untouched best, before the waters rise too far. Bales Worldwide (0870 241 3212) can organise tailor-made expeditions, or contact CTS Horizons (020 7836 9911) or Cox & Kings (020 7873 5000) for other travel options.

Fly Concorde before it goes out of service for ever

A flight on Concorde, which is retiring from service in October, is something every jet-set traveller must experience at least once.

British Airways (0870 850 9850; www.ba.com) is operating



six flights a week to New York, and one flight a week to Barbados, until October; from £3,499 return to New York (travelling with Concorde out, and World Traveller back) or £6,499 (Concorde both ways). Don't miss your last chance to be part of history.

Become the first Travel Photographer of the Year



A newly launched competition to find new talent and recognise established

travel photographers closes on 14 September. The three categories are People and Places, the Spirit of Adventure and Colour and Passion. First prize includes the rare chance to meet Gavin McKinney, the man responsible for the sub-aqua photography in the Bond films, and go diving with him in the Bahamas. For more information, go to www.tpoty.com.

Save an endangered species, alongside a team of scientists

Earthwatch (01865 318838; www.earthwatch.org/europe), a charity organisation fighting to save endangered species, runs a variety of expeditions and projects across the globe. In



Australia, species of frogs are vanishing without explanation; if you like being near water, there are sea otters in Alaska, manatees in Belize, turtles in the Amazon and dolphins in the Mediterranean that all need your help. Lend a hand now, before they disappear.