

CASA, TASTE, TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

VOGUE

EDITED BY MANJU SARA RAJAN

living

TRAVEL

ITALIAN APERITIVO

ALEX KURUVILLA offers you a taste of Italy through his 18-day journey that was a coming-of-age gift for his daughter, an art history student. For him, it was a return to his favourite haunts. For her, it was a whole new world

Photographed by ALEX KURUVILLA

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WHEN IN VENICE
A visit to art connoisseur Francois Pinault's contemporary art centres is a must.



CITY BREAK
Clockwise from top left: The plush interiors of the Regina Hotel Baglioni; the frescoes at a typical Florentine palace; outside the Punta della Dogana art centre

ROME

Start in the fashion and cultural epicentre of Italy. Find Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci at every step.

VISIT: As dilettantes will vouch, a trot up to the Vatican Museum is a must. Walk past the Sistine Chapel to plumb through the archives of the Roman Catholic Church. Here, you'll find Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished *St Jerome in the Wilderness* and Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ*. Another slice of the Renaissance can be found at Villa Borghese. It houses the private art collection of the Borghese family and includes works by Raphael, Titian, Caravaggio and Rubens. (It's rumoured that they acquired Raphael's *Deposition of Christ* by force).

HOTSPOT: San Giovanni Decollato is unusual in that it's a bit of an exclusive church, which means it's only open to visitors by appointment. Discover the

chilling history of the church that gave condemned criminals a respectable burial. Back in the day, it could pardon criminals sentenced to death. Today, it looks after their dependants.

STAY AT: The Regina Hotel Baglioni, which once housed the Queen of Savoy. A stroll around the fashionable side of the capital, Via Condotti, Via Borgognona and Via Frattina, could leave you with a battered credit card. Baglionihotels.com

EAT AT: In the Pigneto quarter, trust Da Felice to whip up a delightful menu without frills. At the other end of the spectrum there's Primo, which gives a new spin to rough luxe with dangling lamps, pale walls and tiled floors. Feliceatestaccio.com; Primoalpigneto.it

VENICE

If you must get on a gondola, do it to get to the city's museums and galleries.

VISIT: Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana are pegged as the contemporary art centres of Europe. Tycoon art connoisseur Francois Pinault and architect Tadao Ando teamed up to create a space for permanent exhibits by Damien Hirst and Takashi Murakami. Subodh Gupta's works are now part of an ongoing exhibition.

STAY AT: For a room with a view, head to the Luna Hotel Baglioni, which offers a great view of the Grand Canal. The best one is from Terrace Suite, looking out to the Venice Lagoon and San Marco basin. Baglionihotels.com

EAT AT: In a lane flanked by the Guggenheim Foundation and Accademia Gallery sits Ai Gondolieri, popular with designers Roberto Cavalli and Valentino. Equally charming is the restaurant within the twin palaces of Palazzi Barbaro, which are chiselled in Venetian Gothic and Baroque styles. Aigondolieri.it

Florence spreads out like an extended Michelangelo museum. Whether it's through his famous *David*, or his nephew's home, Casa Buonarroti, this is a great place for an introduction to his work

SAN CASCIANO DEI BAGNI, TUSCANY

Dante and Botticelli called it home. Not only did Tuscany give us the Renaissance, it also gives us fine Italian wines.

VINEYARD TOUR: If the Poggio Antico vineyard had a report card to show for its performance, it would get straight 'A's. It's been on the list of Top 100 Wines of the Year (by *Wine Spectator*) at least five times since 1990.

HOTSPOT: The 12th-century monastery Abbey of Sant'Antimo has a quiet, undisturbed air about it. The Gregorian prayer chants sung by the resident monks envelope this fine Romanesque church, and

inevitably leave visitors transfixed—even if it lasts all of 12 minutes.

STAY AT: The gentle slopes of Siena Hills are home to Fonteverde Natural Spa. The 17th-century retreat was created to tap the healing powers of the hot springs. The resort is near the famed wineries of Brunello di Montalcino and the shopping districts. Fonteverdespa.com

EAT AT: Treat your palate to the best crop of wines at the Osteria Primavera. And rely on the tips of sommelier-owner Fabio for tips on food pairings. For a charming, cosy restaurant, head to Ristorante Daniela, which concocts a new menu every day. A similar vibe runs through the

Ristorante Boccon' Divino, a family-run home-style eatery. Bsur.it/boccondivino

FLORENCE

The city spreads out like an extended Michelangelo museum, given that most of his sculptures are in Florence. Whether it's through his famous *David*, at Galleria dell'Accademia, or his nephew's home, Casa Buonarroti, this is a great place for an introduction to his work.

VISIT: The Galleria dell'Accademia has historically protected the works that were deemed too liberal by the church. For classics, turn to the Uffizi Gallery, which was originally an office space for >

Florentine magistrates. Paintings by da Vinci, Botticelli and Raphael enjoy pride of place. Another spot with a curious history is Museo Nazionale del Bargello. For 200 years, the fortress served as a prison. The inner courtyard, where many great sculptures are now placed, has witnessed many executions. A museum since 1865, it houses both Michelangelo's *Drunken Bacchus* and Donatello's bronze *David*.

STAY AT: The brainchild of entrepreneur Andreas Panconesi, Luisa via Roma is a fashion haven—a three-storey boutique property with one luxurious suite. It also offers a sumptuous menu whipped up with pure organic produce sourced from Panconesi's farm. Luisaviaroma.com

EAT AT: Coco Lezzone is a cheery eatery with a handwritten menu, which is evidence of the attention paid to detail. It's a homely restaurant that doesn't accept credit cards. For a spectacular view coupled with a superior dining experience, head to The Loggia Restaurant in Villa San Michele, which overlooks palaces, bell towers, bridges, domes and woodlands. Villasanmichele.com



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AMALFI COAST

This playground of the rich and the famous marries art with luxury perfectly.

HOTSPOT: At the Capri Palace Hotel & Spa, you're greeted by canvases and sculptures everywhere. The bar features installations by Allen Jones; and it runs an 'Artists in Residence' project in collaboration with New York's Guggenheim and London's Tate Gallery.

STAY AT: Santa Caterina is the grand dame of Amalfi hotels. Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie stayed here while filming *Mr and Mrs Smith*. Run by the Gambardella family, the rooms feature 19th-century antiques, with balconies looking on to the yacht harbour. Hotelsantacaterina.it

EAT AT: The Taverna del Capitano restaurant has revamped old recipes from Norman and Moorish cultures. Chef Alfonso Caputo whips up unique combinations such as chicory-and-prawn soup, and sardines with fennel. Alternatively, Il Riccio Ristorante, the cliffside restaurant housed in the Capri Palace Hotel & Spa, offers every conceivable type of seafood. Tavernadelcapitano.it; Capripalace.com ■

