

SWAPPING
'THE WHIP OF GIZZELLE'
FOR
'THE MOP OF MARIA'

TARGET (泰達財經) had swapped '*Gizzelle and her Whip*' of East Berlin, Germany, for '*Maria and her Mop*' of Bagno di Romagna, Italy.

It was shock to the nervous system.

In fact, it would be a shock to most international travellers' nervous systems.

In East Berlin, this medium knew what to expect.

In Bagno di Romagna, located southeast of Bologna, Italy, just west of Florence, known popularly as Forli and Cesena, but shown on maps as Tuscan-Romagna Appennines, which is about a 3-hour drive from Bologna, one was surprised (and shocked) to learn the definition of a 4-star hotel, according to the Italian parlance.

It is nothing that **TARGET** would have expected or has ever experienced.

Talk about a mama-and-papa shop and you have, literally, Hotel Tosco Romagnolo, located at Piazza Dante Alighieri in the heart of the 2,000-year-old hamlet of about 2,000 Italians, mostly friendly peasants or elderly retirees from a life of working on the land.

The '*bus*' journal from Paris, France, to Bologna, Italy, known as Air France, Flight 1828, was uneventful except that the small snack, offered on board, was inedible – which is, naturally, par for the course for Air France.

The drive from Bologna to Bagno di Romagna was an excitement, in itself, but one that was interesting and the problems, encountered, were easily overcome: If one misses the correct turn on the highway, one is punished for at least one hour in order to find one's way back to the correct road or drive in the correct direction.

On arrival at Hotel Tosco Romagnolo at about 7 p.m. on Saturday, September 6, 2008, there was a little difficulty in negotiating the way to park outside the hotel and, eventually, this medium resorted to entering a one-way road, which was nearly deserted, in any case, in order to unload the suit cases and locate the lady in charge of the hotel.

The '*suite*', assigned to **TARGET**, comprised a bedroom, a small bathroom, and a sitting room, which was about the same size as the bedroom.

In all, the suite measured between 600 square feet and 700 square feet – which was not a bad size for a suite in this part of Italy, as **TARGET** came to learn.

There was one, small piece of soap in the bathroom, one box of tissues, 2, 17-inch, LCD television sets, which only featured Italian news broadcasts, for the most part, a small refrigerator, a desk, and a tiny walk-in closet in which there were one dozen hangers of the variety that could not be removed from the rack.

And, there was no air-conditioning system in the suite – because the system had broken down in the entire hotel.

Sweat, sweat, sweat!

It had taken **TARGET**'s duo about 11 hours to travel from Hotel Adlon Kempinski in Berlin, Germany, to Hotel Tosco Romagnolo in Bagno di Romagna, Italy, and, on being promised that the central air-conditioning system would kick in, in due course, hot and nearly naked, the bed seemed just too tempting to consider much of a complaint about the hot and very sticky conditions.

But, by morning, it was just too much: This medium was ready to move out of this, so-called, 4-star hotel and look for something civilised – especially since the temperature had risen to about 34 degrees Celsius.

After multiple complaints to management, restrained but firm, mind you, the air-conditioning came on and Suite 324 started to cool down to a more comfortable temperature.

On Sunday morning, September 7, 2008, **TARGET** took a stroll down, what was thought to be, one of the main hamlet roads.

It turned out to be the only main road of the hamlet and the stroll took about 15-minutes, from one end of the road to the other.

But, what a sight!

One was reminded of the movie, *'The Godfather'*, when the killer of the police chief and a rival mobster, the killer, being the son of the godfather, played by Marlon Brando, had to secret himself in Italy in the boondocks; and, one was treated, in the movie, to scenes of Italy in the 1940s.

Bagno di Romagna, however, is a trip to the 1920s, just after World War I.



Elderly ladies and gentlemen, cigarettes, dangling from their mouths, line the hamlet's single road (actually, it was little more than a lane), chatting away, playing with the young children or dogs, and watching out for neighbours – who were doing exactly the same thing as they.

Because of the lack of motor vehicles, spewing out carbon monoxide, the air of this charming little hamlet is fresh and pure for the most part.

In the centre of the hamlet stands The Basilica of Santa Maria Assunta, a beautiful old medieval structure, which is about 1,500 years old.



This Basilica houses art treasures, dating back to the 15th Century.

Some of the treasures comprise:

1. The painting of The Madonna with Child, also known as The Madonna of the Rose, painted by Maestro of S. Ivo between the 14th Century and 15th Century;
2. The Crucifixion, painted by Alessandro Gherardini, painted between the 17th Century and the 18th Century; and,
3. The Nativity, attributed to the School of Ghirlandaio of the 15th Century.

The bells of this old Basilica, every Sunday morning, ring out its message: *'Come to mass! Tithe!'*

After mass, it is back to the business of drinking and eating in small eateries that sprout, like mushrooms at certain times of the day, along the cobble-stoned lane of the hamlet or around Piazza Santa Maria.

On Sunday morning, it is time to relax – which is not very different from any other day at Bagno di Romagna.

Eating at Bagno di Romagna is a treat which should not be missed.

On Sunday, September 7, 2008, at about 1 p.m., just before the midday nap, which is traditional and lasts about 3 hours, **TARGET** ate at one of the many non-descript restaurants, near Piazza Santa Maria, called Giovanna, and, for about €50, ate the following:

Gnocchi with mushrooms
Roast Chicken, marinated with Rosemary,
Gelato
Tiramisu
A One Litre Carafe of Sangiovese Wine

The food was cooked in the Toscana-Romana tradition.

And it was, in a word, amazing.

No additives; no pretensions; no embellishments; just, plain, wonderful, natural flavours.

The mushrooms had come from Mount Comero and were as good and pungent as the famous white truffles of Italy.

The chicken was fresh and melted in one's mouth (no frozen chicken in this part of the world).

Giovanna, as with most restaurants in this part of the world, is a mamma-and-papa shop, to be sure, but if it were ever exported, it would rate highly, anywhere on the globe.

In terms of Hongkong, if Giovanna could be exported from Bagno di Romagna, along with its serving staff and its cooks, it would be among the best restaurants of the territory.

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