

THE FALCON OF TUSCANY

Nestled in the hills of Tuscany, lies Il Falconiere, a 17th Century chateau which is, today, a hotel-restaurant complex, supported by its own winery, most of its wines, being exported to the US, South Korea, Russia, Germany, Spain, England, and The Netherlands.

It is a well-worn axiom that first impressions are lasting ones and, in the case of Il Falconiere, one could be forgiven for mistakes in making an initial judgement of this charming property – because it is not all that it appears to be at first sight.

The relais, as it is called in Italian (*'relay'*, actually), comprises 20 guest rooms and costs between €270 and €570 per night, depending on the type of accommodation requested.

Expensive?

By any standards, it is expensive.

Is it worth it?

It depends, entirely, on what one wants to achieve, but, in **TARGET**'s opinion and experience, the answer is a resounding: No!

The reason: One does not get one's money's worth, not by a long shot.

If one is keen to *'taste'* modern Italy, then, a stay at Il Falconiere may be considered by travel agents as being not a bad choice of a hotel/inn because, aside from sleeping with history, one has the advantage of eating traditional, authentic Tuscany food, laced with a touch of modernity.



But one pays a Hell of a price for such a privilege.

Compared with The Grand Hotel of Rimini or Hotel Tosco Romagnolo of Bagno di Romagna, Il Falconiere has them beaten, easily.

But, nevertheless, that does not say very much for this hotel.

This medium had predetermined that if there had been no air-conditioning at Il Falconiere, the stay would have been for just one night and, then, it would have been off to Florence.

The fall-back plan was never implemented because there was no reason to move out of this little complex of separate little cabañas.

The trip from Rimini to Cortona, where Il Falconiere is located, took about 3 hours, using smallish, back roads in order to experience the beauty of the Italian countryside.

TARGET (泰達財經) drove at internationally accepted speeds, ranging from 30 kilometres per hour, when travelling through towns, up to 110 kilometres per hour when travelling on the autostrada.

Other users of the roads, on which **TARGET** drove, were not at all happy with this medium's driving discipline since many Italian drivers maintain a breakneck speeds on all roads and appear to want to make use of every inch of the roads – their half as well as **TARGET**'s half ... and anybody else's portion of the road.

On 90-degree curves, for instance, it is common for Italian drivers to take up the entire road in order to negotiate the turn, obviously trying to emulate the historic actions of that former, famous racing-car driver, Enzo Ferrari, whose iconic motor car, still bearing his name, continues to be the passion of most Italians who admire motor-vehicle, engineering excellence accompanied by a style which is distinctive of Italy and, of course, the Ferrari.

Cortona is in Tuscany and boasts of having some of the best sangiovese wines of the country.

The difference between the sangiovese wine of this part of Italy and other parts of the country is that, in this part of Tuscany, the wine is left in French oak barrels to mature whereas, in most other parts of Italy, the wine is permitted to mature in stainless steel vats.

French oak barrels make a huge difference to the finished product.

In short, Tuscany wine boasts of quality; other parts of Italy often go for quantity.

Which wine is better: It is, strictly, a matter of personal taste.

On the first night of **TARGET**'s stay at Il Falconiere, this was the menu that was enjoyed:

*Composition of Marinated Beef and Swordfish
with Fruit Passion Dressing on a Bed of Tomato Slices*

*Zucchini Flowers Risotto Blended with Puree of Salt Cod
and Extra Virgin Olive Oil*

*The accompanying wine: **Pinot Bianco Cortona Terlano***

*Chianina Beef Stuffed Raviolis with Sautéed White Beans
flavoured with Rosemary*

*The accompanying wine: **Etna Rosso 2005**
Tenuta delle Terre Nere*

*Guinea Fowl Breast Stuffed with Sausage,
Figs and Vinsanto Sauce*

*The accompanying wine: **Ardito 2005**
Az Baracchi*

Cappuccino Mousse with Cream and Bitter Cocoa

*The accompanying wine: **Solenne 2003**
Coscina Baracchi*

The cost of the above: €332.

This was an extortionate cost for the above meal!

It was not worth the money and **TARGET** noted that many guests try the food only once because, not more than 10 minutes from Il Falconiere, one may obtain similar food at one tenth of the price, demanded by this inn.

Day Two

Monday, September 15, 2008, started off with a traditional Italian breakfast, comprising salami, home-made breads, home-made jams, a combination of 4 different kinds of cheeses, cherry tomatoes, yoghurt, fruit juices, fresh fruit and cappuccino.

It was, then, off to the Town of Cortona, located about 10-minutes' drive from Il Falconiere.

Having driven **TARGET**'s rented Mercedes, diesel-powered, motor car to the public car park of Cortona, and having taken the escalator to the top of the high hill, which is about 500 metres above sea level, it was as though one had stepped back into time.

Cortona was founded in the 6th Century B.C. and a visit to the Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca e della Città di Cortona in the heart of this town was both instructive and quite remarkable, considering the condition of many of the artefacts on display.

Compared to the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Germany, designed by Polish-born architect, Mr Daniel Libeskind, the Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca e della Città di Cortona is an outright winner; and, the powers-that-be in Cortona deserve to be proud of their accomplishments, exemplified by this outstanding collection of part of Italian history.

The museum is, actually, part of the large historic edifice in which it is housed and, after roaming the many rooms of the museum and reading the descriptions of the excavated treasures, from coffins, to golden jewellery, to mosaic-tiled floors, one would have to be an utter fool to come away without some appreciation of the Etruscan way of life, more than 2,600 years ago.

By noon of that Monday, **TARGET** was more than a little hungry and, after all, since this was Italy, a slice of pizza was in order.

(Watch out Isola, Pizza Hut and Mistral and all of the other 'frauds' of Hongkong which claim to be able to make pizza: Your lies have caught up with you!)

Wandering through the historic town of Cortona is quite an experience, by itself, because, aside from the Etruscans who, for centuries, inhabited it, the invasion by Rome in about 310 B.C. had profound implications of the way of life of the indigenous inhabitants.

The Romans brought to Tuscany their laws, initiated a Roman civilised way of life, and, perhaps, very importantly was the introduction of bathing to the Etruscans, many of whom died early deaths from poor dietary habits to the inability to fight what would, today, be considered among the easiest of all infections to cure.

The human population of Cortona, today, is about 23,000, mostly elderly people since there are few jobs in the town, other than catering for the small bands of tourists that wander through the very narrow stone streets.

Absolute junk is sold everywhere, but the American tourists seemed to be very happy with their prizes, stuffed under their fat arms, for the most part.

TARGET overheard one American lady remark to her husband that she had not intended to buy the painting, but *'it was so cheap for this antique (sic) and, after it has been framed in green, it will look absolutely stunning!'*

(No comment from this medium.)

Unfortunately for tourists, Cortona enjoys a great deal of rain, which is good for grapes, mushrooms, and many other kinds of fruits, including olives, the groves of which can be seen throughout the region, but the rain is not appreciated when one is trying to discover the roots of Western civilisation.

It was in 585 B.C. that Western philosophy was born in Asia Minor, in a coastal town, then known as Miletus, Miletus, being not very far from this part of the world, actually.

This was about the same time that Cortona was founded, ironically.

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