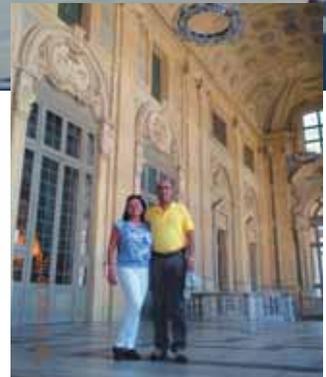




Turin



Amala & Karl Dantas at the Palazzo Madama

Italian Sojourn (Part II)

In the second and final article about their self-drive trip to Lombardy and Piedmont in Northern Italy, Amala and Karl Dantas showcase the kaleidoscopic sights, sounds and experiences of Piedmont region

AFTER a wonderful stay in the Lombardy region, our expectations were high as we hit the road from Lazise of Lake Garda to Asti in Piedmont region, which lies in the North Western corner of Italy and is bordered by Switzerland and France. The region is famous for its gourmet food and excellent world class wines. The cuisine and wines are just one aspect of the region, which is also very picturesque, dotted with small towns and villages rich in history and culture. We reached Asti in about three-and-a-half hours with a short break for lunch at a service station, one each located at regular intervals on the motorways.

The beauty of Piedmont cannot be ignored with its undulated slopes covered with vineyards and olive groves, interspersed with beautiful huge villas. We chose “Locanda del Sant’Uffizio Charme Resort” 14030

Cioccaro di Penango, Asti, a jewel hidden in the vineyards. We truly enjoyed our three-night stay in this charming, romantic 17th Century monastery, perched on a hill in the countryside, now restored into a lovely resort. It has 41 rooms and suites, all beautifully decorated and set amidst the Piedmont & Monferrato vineyards. This resort is also part of the Solieve Group of hotels. We had some excellent traditional Piedmont cuisine accompanied with wines served in their gourmet restaurant. We were given a beautiful suite in the main building and most evenings we spent relaxing

in the outdoor swimming pool. This resort is famous for holding weddings, meetings and conferences. We were lucky to witness one such wedding reception on the evening of our arrival. The Wellness Spa will start at the end of this month and will be an added attraction of the property. In autumn the three-night package starts at EUR 220 per person on MAP.

Next morning, we started our exploration by driving to Turin, the capital of Piedmont, an hour-and-a-half drive from Locanda. We teamed up with our guide Ileana Bertolotto

in the main square, Piazza Castello. Turin is famous for its delightful cafes and pasticcerie or cake shops where you can sit in elegant surroundings. Our guide decided we should first visit one of the oldest historical cafes, Caffè-Pasticceria Baratti & Milano in Piazza Castello for the popular hot drink, “Bicerin,” made of hot chocolate, coffee and light milk cream, served in a small



Junior Suite of Locanda del Sant’Uffizio Charme Resort, Asti



Residenza Dolce Vita Resort & SPA -Lake Maggiore



Vineyards of Piedmont



Lake Maggiore, Borromean, Island

Getting There: All European carriers fly to Milan.

Best Time to Visit: Mid-March to mid-June and September to November. Avoid July/August as it gets very hot and crowded. Italians take their vacation in August, .

Where to Stay: There is accommodation to suit every budget. For the high-end travellers, villa-stay is a must in this region. There are plenty of options in all categories of hotels in Como, Verona, Turin and Asti.

Local Travel: Self-drive is the best option, but if that is not possible then train travel is good. Buy the Trentalia rail pass, but that will restrict your stay in the big cities. One can still go for day excursions to the wine region.

Visa: Schengen visa is required, which can take one to two weeks to get processed.

glass called Bicerin, along with delicious assortment of tiny pastries. Turin is also known for its chocolates and hazelnuts. Food and wine are the highlight of the Piedmont region. The 'Slow Food Movement' started in Piedmont in 1986 to protect and preserve the traditional and regional cuisine from fast food while supporting local producers. This region is famous for its White Truffle, coveted by gourmands world over, grown here in Alba. The Truffle Season starts in October and continues till the beginning of December. The Piedmont wine region has one of the world's best bold red wines like Barolos, Barbera and Barbarescos, as well as the sweet, light and sparkling white Asti Spumante.

We started our walk from the Piazza Castello and the Royal Palace, covering the Opera House, Turin Cathedral, Palazzo Madama with its rich interiors and beautiful staircase. After walking for a long time through the streets and piazzas of Turin in the hot afternoon, we finally decided to stop for lunch at a nice traditional restaurant, La Smarrita Lo Studio Cavour. This city is rich in culture and history with numerous art galleries, restaurants, churches, gardens, theatres,

libraries and museums. It did not surprise us to learn that Turin was the first capital of Italy.

From Turin, we drove back to Asti to Castello di Razzano, Alfiano Natta Piedmont where we had a wine-tasting appointment that evening. We drove through narrow, winding roads till we arrived at a large, sprawling property amidst vineyards and olive groves. Here we met the owner Augusto Olearo and his wife Rita. Four generations of the Olearo family have been producing these wines. Augusto asked us to take a tour of the 'Artevino Razzano' museum in the castle of Razzano. It has a collection of artwork and old tools used by farmers in the olden days. The museum is dedicated to Barbera, the main wine of the Monferrato region. After the short tour, we entered the historical wine cellars that are still used today to age the company's most important wines. Lastly, we stopped at the shop where we met Augusto for wine-tasting. We went through about 11 different wines, starting with the white Chardonnay, followed by Barbera D'Asti Monferrato, a red wine-Dolcetto for

everyday drinking, La Leona 2011 a young wine, Pinot Noir. We went on tasting one red wine after another. Also, there was one wine in honour of Augusto's father called Eugenea Superiore 2009, containing 70% Barbera and 30% Merlot, Pinot Noir and Docetto grapes. The Olearos have olive groves and manufacture their own extra virgin olive oil. We decided to spend the last day simply doing nothing, but chilling and enjoying our lovely resort and its beautiful surroundings. We relaxed over a bottle of Barolo wine with our dinner, and spent the evening simply soaking in the ambience.

Next morning, we said our goodbyes and drove to Residenza Dolce Vita Wellness Resort, Lake Maggiore. The drive of about two-and-a-half hours was through numerous villages/towns on Lake Maggiore. We arrived in time to have a small lunch since we had booked a massage at 5 pm. The resort where we halted is located in the village of Giffa-Lake Maggiore on a hill overlooking the lake. It is a very beautiful property with a wonderful spa. The Autumn packages at this property start at EUR 300 per person, which includes a two-night accommodation with breakfast plus one A la carte dinner (excluding drinks) and one Kembiki massage for females and sports massage for males. Chef Roberto Barboni cooked a wonderful four course Chef's Tasting Menu, accompanied by wines from the region. It was a perfect ending to a wonderful trip, as the next morning we had to say "arrivederci" (goodbye) to Piedmont and drive back to Milan for our flight home. We had the most memorable trip, which we highly recommend to people looking for new destinations, and for those who have already been to Italy. ■



Palazzo Real of Turin



Augusto Olearo & Karl Dantas before the wine tasting session