

# Journey's End at Lovers' Meeting

Paul Graham visits Verona – the home of Romeo and Juliet and a year-round destination for true romantics

**I**f music be the food of love... then Verona is the seven course Michelin starred taster menu! (Stick with me; I know that's from Twelfth Night). Famed for its annual summer opera extravaganza and as home of the tragic lovers Romeo and Juliet, there is no other place quite like Verona. The city is big enough to get lost in yet small enough to comfortably explore on foot, with plenty of stops for that compulsory cappuccino or chilled glass of Lugana – the wine from nearby Lake Garda.

To celebrate a romantic anniversary I wanted something Italian but also something 'different' and whilst they say Venice is the city for lovers I didn't want to share my time with throngs of tourists. So, based purely on Shakespeare's recommendation, I took the plunge and decided on Verona.

I didn't quite know what to expect, although arriving at the airport to be greeted by the Egyptian God Horus I quickly realised this was going to be an

interesting stay. Our hotel was right in the centre of town just behind the Roman Arena in one of many narrow streets. As we were shown to our room I couldn't help but share a thought with Macbeth... *I bear a charmed life.*

Time to explore. With Verona Card in hand – which includes three days' entry to monuments, museums and local transport for 15€ – we hit the streets and piazza's. The Roman Arena is stunning and still in use as intended, as an entertainment venue after nearly 2000 years. Heading to Piazza Erbe, via the stylish shopping area of Via Mazzini, we stopped for a lunch of antipasti and amoretti... *A dish fit for the gods* (à la Julius Caesar), before arriving at the home of one half of the world's most famous lovers, Juliet Capulet. As you pass into the gated courtyard and read the love notes left on the walls over the years I defy even the toughest heart not to melt. We toured the home of said Juliet, who really did exist, finally stepping out onto the famous balcony to



be snapped by our fellow visitors in the courtyard below whilst reciting... *Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?* (Finally, I got there!)

And so to the main event. If you only ever see one opera in your life then it has to be the spectacle of Aida at the Arena di Verona, with grand sets, a huge cast and thousands of candles lighting the night sky.

Verona is simply a nicer version of Venice, with similar architecture but not as touched by commercialism. It feels richer though is not as expensive and doesn't feel crowded. As we left we couldn't help but agree with Juliet herself... *Parting is such sweet sorrow.* ■



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